STUNNING TWO CD ISSUE PACKED WITH DEMOS

PC POWER

ISSUE 11 ● NOVEMBER '94 ● £4.99 CD

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PRINTED IN THE U.K.

NASCAR Racing

World EXCLUSIVE preview & demo on one of our TWO CDs!

PC POWER

Little Big Adventure
Playable demo of Adeline's new 3-D Super VGA ellipsoid adventure. It'll blow your mind!

GAME DEMOS COLLECTION Volume 8

NO CD? ASK YOUR NEWSAGENT

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Papyrus's new SVGA racing sim exclusive to PC Power.

Dragon Lore
Fantastic CD-ROM demo of Mindscape's rendered game.

Simon the Sorcerer
Plenty of laughs with the playable demo of this full 'talkie' adventure.

Novastorm
A massive, exclusive playable demo of this new shoot'em-up from Psygnosis.

Project X
Frantic shooting action in this Amiga conversion from Team 17.

Psycho Pinball
Codemasters jump on the pinball bandwagon with this new game.

Total Carnage
Superb blast'em-up from ICE. Just look at the number of sprites!

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More of LBA. Journey through its hidden delights.

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COMPACT disc DATA STORAGE

From the DOS prompt enter the appropriate letter to access your CD-ROM drive (for instance, D: [Return]). Then type PCPOWER [Return].
Turn to page 9 for full instructions on how to use this disc.

If you have any problems with this month's coverdisc contact PDO Disks on 0254-524-48.

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'18' rated Ecstatica
Exclusive Novastorm demo
Scary Harvester
CD-ROM drive bench-test

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WARNING

Game features scenes of graphic violence. If you feel you may be offended, please do not purchase.

PC POWER

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It's odd it is, odd

Oh what a versatile animal the PC is. Arcade games, simulation, puzzle games – the PC does it all, and increasingly well to boot – odd when you take a good, hard look at your PC and realise that rather than one of those nice, simple console things, it is in fact a machine with more oddities, idiosyncrasies and probably perversions than Freud could handle. And most PC owners are a pretty odd bunch, too (myself excluded, of course) with many having a love/hate thang with their machine. Watch them during the day and they'll spend three quarters of their time cursing it, hitting it, wishing they could throw the bloody thing in the nearest bin. Yet if someone else were to criticise their machine they would have to be scooped up off the floor.

So why does the PC demand such odd, misplaced loyalty? Well, part of it must be the expense of the things. PC owners have to buy an object which depreciates in price at about £100 a day. I personally spent £1250 on a machine which could now be picked up for no more than £700. Why did I do it? Am I a fool, off my rocker, ready for the loony bin – completely doo-lally? The answer is probably yes, but rather than admit that, it's easier to hide behind the wondrous-ness of my machine. I couldn't do without it, I say. I neeeed it. But of course I could, and don't. Well, probably, maybe.

But the expense of these large, mis-shapen lumps of plastic and silicon can't be the only reason we're so protective. After all, the majority of people only have their machine at work and they love their machines too (or so I'm told). Time spent getting the thing to run reasonably well must also come into it. How many times have you got your machine to work just so, only for some bugger to start it up when you're not looking, re-configure your Windows, alter your autoexec.bat, remove vital lines from your config.sys and only then delete *Doom* to free up space. We customise our PCs to work the way we want them to. Unlike consoles they're not one of 100,000,000 anonymous machines – exact replicas of each other. Each one is an individual, has a personality of its own and is known intimately by just one person – its user. Each one of them, simply, has a soul. Well, probably, maybe.

And that's probably the reason why we have such loyalty to machines that don't give a toss about our welfare, break down regularly (and for no reason) and make us late for deadlines. That they're flavour of the month – are the only machines capable of processing *Doom*, AVI clips and various other digital whatnots is almost unimportant. Even when the Super Sony Turbo-charged PlayStation comes along, there will still be us sad PC gits, playing the best flight sims, tipple-tappleing on our word processors and looking down on those childish, foolish and deluded console owners – battling *Sonic The Hairy Hog* for the 1000th time. Or something.

Anyway, on with the show. This month sees the arrival of *Rise Of The Robots*, an exclusive review of which can be found on **page 68**. We also have *Doom II* (**page 74**) and *Inferno* (**page 82**). That's three of the biggest games of this year held within the web of our 116 pages. We've also got scoops on some of the best games this Christmas: *NASCAR Racing* (**page 26**), *Novastorm* (**page 32**), *Little Big Adventure* (**page 45**) and *Ecstatica* (**page 48**).

This month also sees the addition of a new regular, The Power Test. Each issue we will grab the best examples of a genre and compare and contrast them. It's not a new idea, we know, but it's still a good one and we'll be the only magazine who'll be doing it.

So you know where to come.

'Till next month then,

Dave Westley,
Editor.

"The PC is a machine with more oddities, idiosyncrasies and perversions than even Freud could handle."

PAGE 26

NASCAR Racing looks set to shatter all previous conceptions of what a racing game should be like. Play our exclusive demo, then read our exclusive interview.

PAGE 45

These are not the times to be a cute, rounded PC game character. EA's Little Big Adventure and Psygnosis' Ecstatica put the boot in beautifully.

NOVEMBER '94 ISSUE 11

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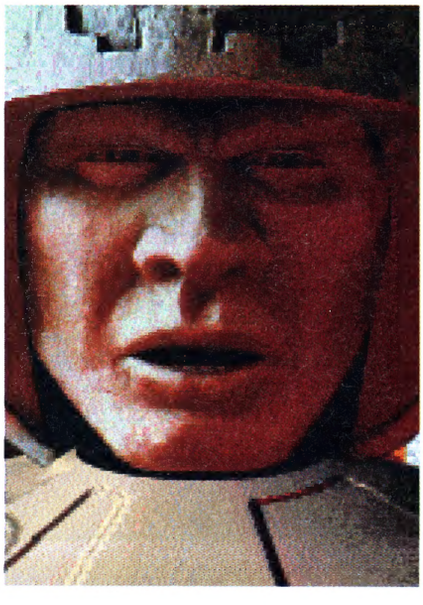

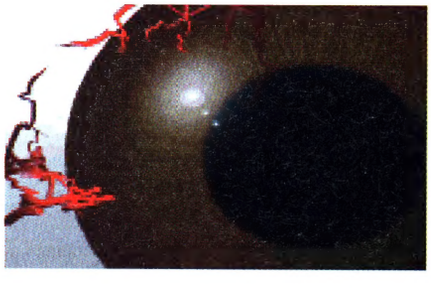

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Do you want a joystick? Well, you can a) buy one, or b) enter our comp and win one of 15 free Saitek joysticks.

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Remember fresh-faced Luke Skywalker? Well Luke (AKA Mark Hamill) is back, a little older, a little wiser and a little bit more knowledgable about porn. Read our in-depth interview.

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We've got THE exclusive Rise of the Robots review. Now it's yours! Don't thank us, we're just doing our job. See how well Mirage have done theirs as we strip these droids to the wires.

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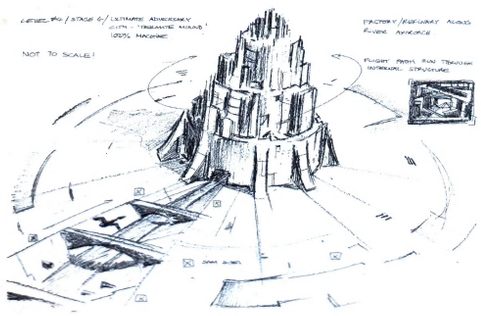


This month's coverdisks

PC Power is two once more with PC Power CD and PC Power HD.

If the spaces for either the compact or floppy disk are empty, then you should speak to your newsagent, immediately. He or she should then be able to give them to you, or replace your magazine.

For more information on these products, please turn to page 6.

Please note: we do all we can to ensure that our disks are in good order. If you have any problems, however, page 6 has the address for where you should send your faulty floppy or compact disks.

TURN TO PAGE 6

Coverdisk

PC POWER
November '94 Issue 11
Project X
If you have grown weary of the daily grind of modern-day life, Team 17 have the solution with this highly enjoyable shoot'em-up.
Arcade Pool
Angles, shot strength and pure luck all have a part to play in this new pool sim from Team 17.
Log onto floppy drive and type PCPOWER [RETURN] to run installation program. Full instructions can be found on page eight of this issue of PC Power.
If you have any queries or problems concerning this month's coverdisk, please contact: PC Wise, Dowlais Top Business Park, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glamorgan, CF48 2YY. Their telephone hotline number is 0685-350-505.

Coverdisks can be a jungle, but Dino Boni is here to guide you through yet another packed PC Power HD disk.

INSTRUCTIONS

Insert the PC Power disk into your floppy disk drive and log onto the floppy drive by typing the following command from your normal DOS prompt:

[drive_letter]: [RETURN]

where [drive_letter] is the name of your floppy disk drive. For instance, if your floppy dive is called 'A', you would type A:[RETURN].

Start the menu system by typing PC POWER[RETURN]. You will be presented with the menu screen. If your hard drive is not called 'C', type your hard drive ID letter when you see the menu.

Select a demo by typing its corresponding number. The menu system will install the game into a separate directory on your hard drive, then return you to the menu.

When you've finished, press the escape key to return to DOS. Log onto your hard drive and change into the directory of the game you want to play with the CD command. The games are kept in the following directories:

Project X	**C:\PROJECT**
Arcade Pool	**C:\ARCADE**

Once you're in the directory, type the following commands to run the software

Project X: type XDEMO [RETURN]

Arcade Pool: type POOLDEMO [RETURN]

Just read the instructions and enjoy this month's demos.

PROJECT X
Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Team 17
Contact: 0924-385-903

Team 17 have excelled themselves yet again with this excellent shoot'em-up. Using a variation of the Salamander power-up system, *Project X* puts you in control of a powerful spaceship, sent to eradicate an alien presence. Multiple weapons, superb graphics and seat-of-the-pants gameplay are the specialities of this game, as I'm sure you will agree when you get to play it!

Once you've started the game, use the cursor keys to move around and press the space bar to fire. Killing aliens will make them release power-up pods, which you can collect by flying over them. These accumulate in your ship, and the more you have on board, the more powerful weapons and defences you can add to your ship.

The demo is quite short, but will give you a good idea of what this brilliant shoot'em-up is all about – i.e. killing things, and lots of them!

ARCADE POOL
Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Team 17
Contact: 0924-385-903

Fancy a game of pool, but can't be bothered to go down the pub? Team 17 could have the answer you're looking for. This new game supports both US and UK rules, and you can even set up a tournament between 6 human players and up to 32 computer-controlled players. A simple, yet effective player interface simplifies the game, but the programmers have managed to keep all the characteristics of pool in this computer simulation.

To start the game, click the left mouse button and you will be presented with the main menu. The only game available in this demo is a game of US 8 ball against a computer opponent. You can either click on 'Start new game' to go straight into the game, or you can click on 'Set up Players' to change the 'Player one' name to your own. (You may recognise some of the computer player's names, by the way!)

Once you're in the game, use the mouse to point to where you want the shot to go. Clicking the left mouse button will plot a 'course' of where the ball will travel, and where it will go after it's hit one of the other balls. Once you're happy with the direction, clicking on the meter in the bottom-right hand corner of the screen will alter the strength of the shot, and when you're happy with everything, press the right mouse button to take the shot.

The game plays standard US rules and uses the stripes and spots method of coding the balls. Apart from that, it's pretty much the same as standard pool. Have fun!

Faulty disk?

If you have any problems with your coverdisk, then please send it to: PC WISE, Dowlais Top Business Park, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glamorgan, CF48 277, or telephone 0685-350-505. PC Power, our suppliers and distributors, cannot be held legally responsible for any faulty disk. In addition, although our coverdisks are thoroughly checked, we cannot be held legally responsible for any virus found.

Coverdisks

CoverCD

Another month, another packed CD! Times two!! Dino Boni brings you some hot stuff, including playable demos of *NASCAR Racing* and *Novastorm*. Plus an EXTRA compilation CD.

INSTRUCTIONS

Insert the CD-ROM drive into your CD drive and then type the following:
[drive_letter]:[RETURN]
where drive_letter is the ID letter for your CD-ROM drive i.e. If your CD drive is called 'D', then you would type D:[RETURN]. Once you've logged onto the CD drive, type PCPOWER[RETURN] to start the PC Power CD Menu.

As per usual, some of the demos (namely the CD-specific titles) can only be run from the CD. To run these, move the highlight bar with the cursor keys until the required game is highlighted, and then press Return. The game will now run.

Some of the games require installing to your hard disk. If this is so, the menu system will ask for your permission before it continues. Answering 'Y' to the prompt will allow the menu system to copy the required files to your hard disk and then unpack them before your very eyes.

If you get into trouble, each game has a help file attached to it. To view these files, highlight the game you want help for, and then press the 'H' key on your keyboard. The file will then be displayed on the screen; you can scroll through the text by using the cursor keys and when you've finished reading the text, the Escape key will take you back to the menu screen. Please read the help file before running or loading any demo.

Once you have finished playing around with this month's CDs, you can exit back to DOS with the Escape key again. We always welcome suggestions or submissions for the CD, especially from PC Demo groups. If you have anything that you would like us to consider for the CD, please send it to the usual address.

Simon the Sorcerer

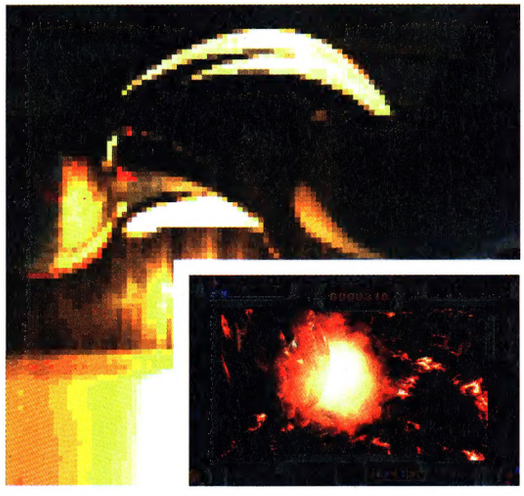
Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Adventuresoft/PDQ
Contact: 021-625-3377
Min Spec 386, 4Mb RAM, VGA, mouse.

Simon the Sorcerer was given the Game of the Month award in issue 9, and a well deserved one it was too. Superb graphics, great gameplay and some of the funniest dialogue ever heard in a game since *Day of the Tentacle* made this an instant hit with the PC Power team. *Simon the Sorcerer* is a graphic adventure, where you play the part of a young lad who is sucked into another world. Featuring the voice of Chris Barrie as Simon, this game is full of laughs from beginning to end.

Novastorm

Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Psygnosis
Contact: 051-709-5755
Min Spec 386DX, 4Mb RAM, VGA graphics.

Previously entitled *Scavenger IV*, *Novastorm* features rendered landscapes, some very fast animated intros and furious blasting action. Not to be missed! In the full game there are four stages, each with four levels, with a big bad guardian to beat at the end of each level. After all that, you're still not safe as you then have to enter a starship/city and confront the biggest baddy of them all – the mighty Artificial Intelligence – SCARAB X.



Dragon Lore

Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Mindscape
Contact: 0444-246-333
Min Spec: 386DX (486 recommended), 4Mb RAM, VGA, mouse.

Cryo have made a name for themselves on the PC CD-ROM scene with their wonderful graphics, and *Dragon Lore* is no exception.

This massive demo shows off some of the best aspects of the game, which include the fully rendered backgrounds and characters. The game is billed as a more appealing version of *The 7th Guest*, and requires a sound logical mind as well as quick reflexes. If you would like to learn more about *Dragon Lore*, take a look at Dave Westley's Cryo feature in issue 7 of PC Power.

Project X

Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Team 17
Contact: 0924-385-903
Min Spec: 386 SX, 4Mb RAM, VGA.

Team 17 have excelled themselves yet again with this excellent shoot'em-up. Using a variation of the Salamander power-up system, *Project X* puts you in control of a powerful spaceship, sent to eradicate an alien presence. Multiple weapons, superb graphics and seat-of-the-pants gameplay are the specialities of this game, as I'm sure you will agree when you get to play it!

Arcade Pool

Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Team 17
Contact: 0924-385-903
Min Spec: 386DX, 4Mb RAM, VGA, mouse.

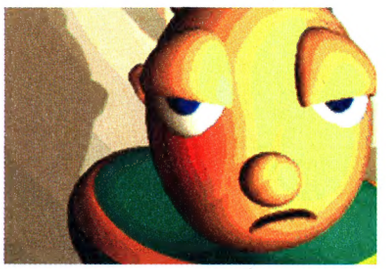
Fancy a game of pool, but can't be bothered to go down the pub? Team 17 could have the answer you're looking for. This new game supports both US and UK rules, and you can even set up a tournament between 6 human players and up to 32 computer controlled players. A simple yet effective player interface simplifies the game, but the programmers have managed to keep all the characteristics of pool in this computer simulation.

Little Big Adventure

Type of Demo: Playable demo & non-playable slideshow
Publisher: EA
Contact: 0753-549-442
Min Spec: 486SX, 4Mb RAM, SVGA.

Adeline have been working on this game for the past 18 months, and you can see the effort that they've put into it as soon as you boot it up. Because they are the creators of *Alone in the Dark*, *Little Big Adventure* looks quite simillar, but it is miles ahead in terms of graphics and playability.

Your alter ego in this game is made up of over 250 polygons and looks so good, you could almost eat him for breakfast. The game is played from a 3-D isometric point of view and runs in SVGA only. As well as the playable demo, we have also included a slideshow that shows you some of the more advanced features in the game, as well as some of the later levels. These have been put separately on the CD.

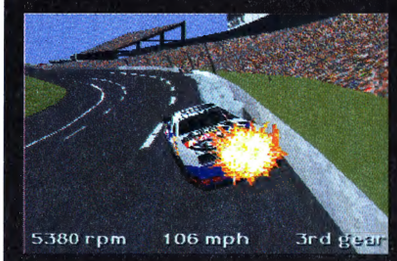


NASCAR Racing

Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: Virgin
Contact: 081-960-2255
Min Spec: 486SX, 4Mb RAM, VGA.

NASCAR Racing looks set to set the world ablaze when it finally makes its way into the shops this Christmas. This particular demo utilises the game's VGA mode only – but it still looks stunning with beautiful shading everywhere.

The *NASCAR Racing* demo allows you to practise around the track of Talladega, in the southern state of Alabama. Get a feel for how a NASCAR car moves – it's totally different to an IndyCar – especially when you're flying around a corner at 200 MPH at a gradient of near 90 degrees!



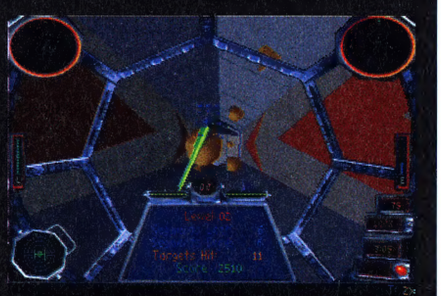
Two CDs?

That's right! PC Power now sports two CDs!

The second disc contains some of the best demos that we have put on previous CDs. As well as this, we have also included some MIDI music files and some FLI animations on the same disc. You will also find a selection of *Doom* .WAD files for you to play (NB. You MUST have the registered version of *Doom* to play these add-on levels).

If this was not enough, we have also included a selection of the best shareware games for both DOS and Windows, plus a plethora of programs produced by demo groups. These people code for fun, not for profit, and try to push the PC to its limits. These demos are quite fussy about the system they run on, so you may have to chop and change your machine around to get them to work.

The diskc is structured in the same way as our first CD, and uses the same menu system that you've all grown accustomed to. If you are in any doubt about how to run the menu system please re-read the instructions opposite.



Total Carnage

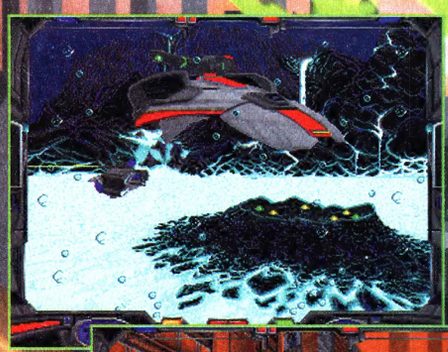
Type of Demo: Playable
Publisher: ICE
Contact: 0453-756-993
Min Spec: 386DX, 2Mb RAM, VGA.

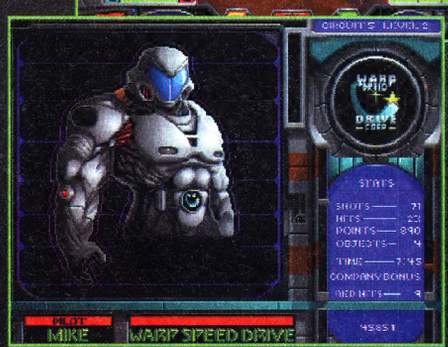
Remember an arcade game a few years ago called *Smash TV*? Well, if you do, you probably remember the sequel called *Total Carnage*. This PC game from ICE is a conversion of the arcade smash hit, with a few additional tweaks and twists. Playing similar to the much loved *Commando*, *Total Carnage* keeps all of the brutal shoot'em-up violence of *Smash TV* and throws in a few new features. Instead of just killing everything in sight, you also have to rescue innocent bystanders from certain death. Powerful weapons, superb animation and frenzied action make this game a must for any hardened shoot'em-up fan.

Coverdiscs

ZEPHYR™

JOIN THE BATTLE





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Games News

The PC Power newshounds have been sniffing out the gaming world's gossip. Sadly we can't tell you about it, so here's some games news instead.

GTE and BRender

The first BRender (Blazing Rendering) based game to be released, *FX Fighter*, has been acquired by the American telecommunications Giant, GTE. GTE is the largest US based local telephone company, and the second largest cellular-service provider in the United States. It earned nearly 20 billion dollars of revenue in 1993 and is the fourth largest telecommunications company in the world – just behind the UK's very own British Telecom. Its entrance into the world of interactive entertainment, under the name of GTE Interactive, is said to represent the 'first stage' of a plan that will eventually extend to a video network, initially passing to 7 million homes in 66 key GTE markets over the next ten years. "It's the dawning of a new era for the company in which on-demand movies, TV, interactive games, education, shopping, banking, travel and video telephone services are also provided to all of its local telephone customers," said Michael Rothman, Director of Marketing at the company.

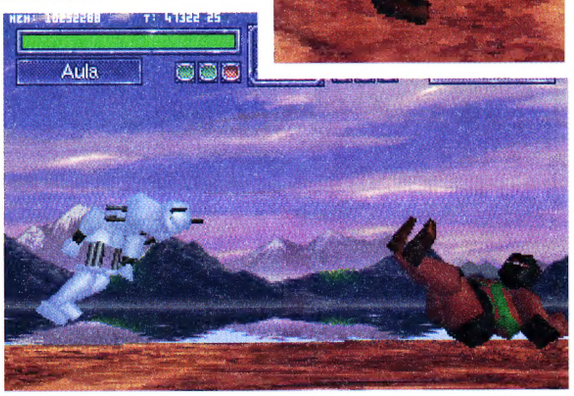
With ten million dollars to spend on marketing alone this year, the company will no doubt soon be a household name to rival the likes of Sega and Nintendo. Certainly they have the products to do it. The exciting *Rapid Assault* (née *Cars*) was previewed in last month's issue, and *Street Hockey* and *Jammit* should follow closely. However, the move to license Argonaut's *FX Fighter* was nothing short of inspired. Whether the game will be any good or not is relatively immaterial – the mere fact that the company will be the first to use the technology will raise a momentous amount of interest (read – free advertising), as will the fact that the game looks almost as impressive as the state-of-the-art *Virtua Fighting* in the Arcades.

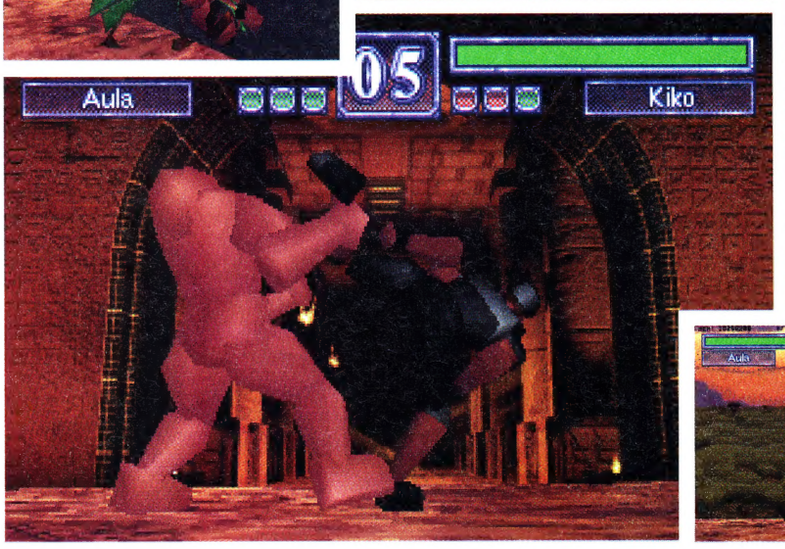
Though the game is still at a very early stage, the company did show it to a number of reporters at this ECTS. A moving camera sits at about 80 degrees from the ground concentrating on two fighters slugging it out in a ring. "On the PC there will be Gouraud-shading, texture-mapping and smooth polygon-rendered, 3-D models to represent the fighters. You'll be able to vary the level of detail to alter the effect – going for clean-cut polygons a la *Virtua Fighting*, or the complexity of detailed texture-maps."

"There are only about three characters that you can use at the moment but there's going to be a wide variety. This one's very similar to the rock man in the Fantastic Four. There's also going to be one that's totally reflective – his texture-mapped surface reflecting everything around him – his opponents, the backdrops – everything.

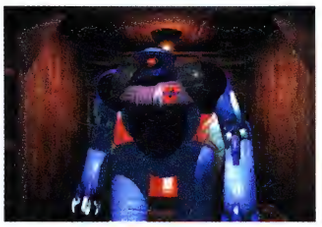
FX Fighter will be released in the second quarter of '95. More next month.

GTE Interactive's FX Fighter is the first BRender (Argonaut's Blazing Rendering) game to be released. It offers Gouraud-shading, texture-mapping and smooth, polygon-rendered, 3-D models to represent the fighters, including one totally reflective, texture-mapped character.

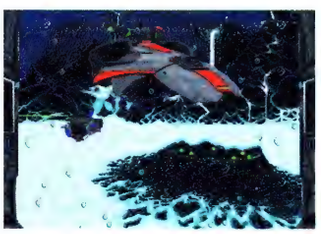




US Gold – and lots of it



US Gold have reacted to the loss of LucasArts and SSI by announcing one of the biggest line-ups in their impressive 10 year history. As well as Access' *Under A Killing Moon*, which failed to make it into this issue by a whisker, the company also have (gasp) *Dominus* (mid Oct), *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall* (March 1995), *Heroes of Might and Magic* (any time now), *Iron Cross* (any time now), *Spectre VR*



(Oct), *Radioactive* (Oct), *Journeyman Project Turbo* (Oct), *World Cup Golf CD* (Oct), *Zephyr* (Nov), *World of Xeen* (Nov), *Hammer of the Gods* (Nov), *Powerdrive* (Nov) and *Super SF 2* (Nov). Phew!

US Gold have also recently announced the acquisition of the rights to publish all of Sanctuary Woods Multimedia's products in Europe. Sanctuary Woods' latest game, *Wolf*, won the 'Best Game Of The Show' award at this year's CES in Chicago and features digitized, photo-realistic imagery and 40 different scenarios. Sanctuary Woods are also responsible for *The Journeyman Project Turbo* that will run four times as quickly as the original.

Waking up the neighbours

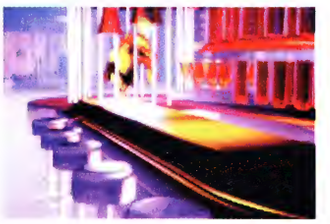
Mindscape's big announcement at the ECTS was an off-the-wall product entitled *Total Distortion*, a 'multimedia' product hoping to combine the creativity of music video production with the "thrill of adventure gaming." Its makers are those responsible for the less-than-totally-successful *Spaceship Warlock*, a game which featured some stunning imagery, but gameplay bordering on drudgery. Mindscape are certain that *Total Distortion* will do better, however. Jim Mackonochie, Mindscape's Sales and Marketing Director, has said: "This is the most exciting CD game I have seen. It is the first time that gaming and pop video cultures have merged to create a great game." But then he would say that, wouldn't he?

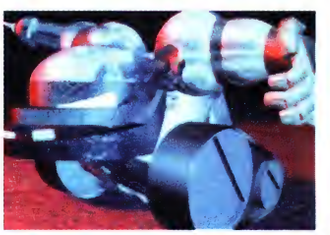
Joe Sparks, one of the producers of the game, agrees, however. "*Total Distortion* has many of the elements found in traditional adventure gaming – you have an inventory to store and use items, and stats for your character like physical health, mental health, etc." Where the game is said to differ is with the rewards offered to the player. "In most adventure games you're rewarded with things like silver keys or bright gems. In *Total Distortion* the real treasure is media treasure, as in video clips you can grab with your camera, sound chips, lost recordings and more."

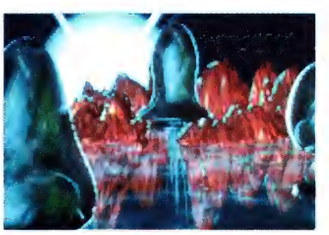
***Total Distortion* will be ready for review next month. It should be interesting if nothing else.**

Mindscape's other big announcement was the acquisition of the license for the latest Cryo game, *Commander Blood*. The game is a massive space opera, with countless planets to visit and black holes to go through, packed full of weird and wonderful creatures. The aim of the game is to find the Big Bang, though quite why you want to find this hasn't yet been explained... Perhaps your character is a budding Stephen Hawking-type.

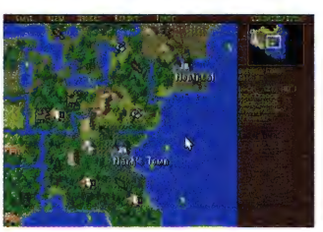
Next month our news-hound Derek Delafuente will travel to Cryo for an in-depth scoop on the game. 'Till then you can gawp at these pretty and totally exclusive, 'not to be found elsewhere', pictures!







Manic MicroProse



Like US Gold, the months leading up to Christmas will be a busy time for MicroProse. As well as the visually stunning SVGA *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (December) they also have *Sid Meier's Colonization* (very soon), *Zeppelin* (very soon), *Masters of Magic* (October), *Pizza Tycoon* (October), *Navy Strike* (November), *Transport Tycoon* (November), and *Across The Rhine* (December).

MicroProse have also announced *Top Gun* for February 1995. Spectrum Holobyte have signed a four year deal with Viacom Consumer products to develop a new flight simulation based on the film of the same name. "It's a perfect marriage," said Gilman Louie. "Top Gun is one of the most popular action/adventure movies in history, and we're leaders in the flight simulation category. It's a great opportunity to add a second major brand to our family. Along with our forthcoming *Falcon 4.0*, we're confident that we'll be able to offer flight sim enthusiasts a wide and exciting range of choices."

More news on MicroProse's mammoth forthcoming catalogue will be in next month's issue.

Gremlin at work

As well as a whizzy new logo, Gremlin Graphics also announced a new level of commitment to the PC at this autumn's ECTS. While *Desert Strike* (see review, PCP 10) is now probably flying off the shelf at your local store, shooting some mad terrorists-cum-irritating grannies in the process, the company are also preparing themselves to release another batch of products: *Jungle Strike* (November), *Retribution* (November) and *Slipstream* (December).

Retribution looks the most interesting of these new releases. The game engine uses something very similar to the Voxel technique pioneered (and patent applied for) by NovaLogic but "with a difference", according to Steve McKevitt, PR Manager at the company. Its special features are said to include "a dramatic and emotive classical score composed and performed especially by the award-winning classical composer Chris Adams; artwork by the creative consultant on the new multi-million dollar Judge Dredd movie, Kev Walker, and a celebrity voice-over and in-game narration."

Punters are more likely to be interested in the game's gameplay, however, and fortunately, early indicators suggest that the game won't disappoint. The actual graphics look far better than those in *Comanche* ("this isn't just another nice front end, shame about the game," says McKevitt) and the gameplay is arcade-style, without being too simplistic.

The game features twelve levels with four missions per level. Each new level basically takes the player to another location with a new terrain and a new threat. Interestingly, the game doesn't just require fast reflexes and an itchy trigger finger, a fair amount of thought will have to be put into the game as well. On one level, for example, success depends upon you noticing that the only way to destroy your target is to destroy its shield, and that the only way to do that is to release the waters from a dam to submerge its generators. Expect a review next month (possibly, maybe...).

Countdown

If you played the *Countdown* game on last month's coverdisc and enjoyed testing your verbal and numeric skills to the limit, then why not order the full game and stretch your mind even futrther? For orders, call Lockton Software on 0932-350-072.

Virtual Elite

Elite have two new PC products rushing their way towards completion.

***Virtuoso*, to be released in November, looks to be the closest. It's set in the 21st Century, in a land where 'only music and VR offer an escape from crime and corruption.'**

The game features digitised character graphics – "professionally filmed and processed and viewed from the third person." The game will also feature fully interactive texture-mapped backdrops with realistic contour mapping.

***Powerslide* is Elite's second big game, also to be released in November. It's being developed by Maelstrom and looks to be something very special indeed.**

"*Powerslide* has been developed for the discerning gamesplayer and incorporates strategic development principles, leading edge production technology, and Elite's '*Virtual Modelling*' concept. The player is presented with a polished game of an unquestionably high standard and unrivalled playability, resulting in a truly state-of-the-art rally sim."

With a two player, split screen option, a choice of vehicles and a multitude of tracks, US Gold's *Powerdrive* should give you a run for you money.

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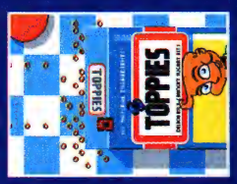
THE ORIGINAL
Micro Machines™
SCALE MINIATURES



"Consistently entertaining and relentlessly addictive - a fabulous racing game" 90% PC GAMER.

Codemasters

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Volume 3
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Mega Race, Myst, Darkseed and Desert Storm are just a few of the top action demos in Volume 4.

Volume 5
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Volume 6
Zool 2, Theme Park, TIE Fighter, Overlord, Epic Pinball Super Android, Robinson's Requiem and CD3.

Volume 7
Rise Of The Robots, Desert Strike, Star Trek: The Next Generation, Empire Soccer, Countdown and Windows Utilities.

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MICROSOFT WINDOWS

CREATIVE
CREATIVE LABS

Get a Grip

PC POWER and CONTEMPORARY GAMES bring joy to your hearts with the chance to win one of 15 JOYSTICKS!

Joysticks come and joysticks go. Frequently. PC gamers give their joysticks a tough time and they have to be robust to stand up to the trials that their owners put them through. This means a new joystick is always welcome, so those very generous people at Contemporary Games have given PC Power 15 of the best joysticks to give away.

The Saitek Megagrip 8 joystick is an analogue stick suitable for all kinds of PC games. It sports four fire buttons, a comfortable grip design, X and Y trim controls and suction cups to keep it rooted firmly to your desk. Finished in black, this joystick normally retails at £19.99, but thanks to Contemporary Games, we have 15 of them to give away FREE. All you have to do is answer the three questions below, correctly.

Questions

(1) How does the Megagrip 8 transmit its data to your PC?
(a) Digitally
(b) Analogue
(c) Word of mouth

(2) How many fire buttons has the Megagrip 8 got?
(a) 4
(b) 2
(c) 5

(3) What game is the Megagrip 8 best suited to?
(a) Flight sims
(b) Driving sims
(c) All types of game

When you have carefully worked out your answers, write them down on a postcard or the back of a sealed envelope, before you forget. PLEASE remember to include your NAME and ADDRESS, or we won't be able to send you your lovely prize, will we? Then send it all to: Get a Grip Comp, PC Power, Durham House, 124 Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 1NF. Entries should be with us by December 15th, or we'll use them as coffee mats.

Multimedia News

Forget Peter Smith, forget Trevor Mcdoughnut, forget The Guardian. The only news you'll ever need is here, courtesy of the MPC & CD-ROM User team.

New Amitek upgrades

Silica have announced the launch of two new upgrade kits from Amitek this month. The first of these is a sound card pack, which uses the Media Vision Jazz 16, which is essentially a SoundBlaster 16 clone. The stereo card features a built-in SCSI 2 CD-ROM interface, a joystick/MIDI port and the usual speaker and microphone jacks. Also supplied are three games, *Alien Breed, James Pond II* and the shareware version of *Doom*. The pack costs just £69.

The second bundle is based on the Media Vision CDR-H93MV double speed SCSI 2 CD-ROM drive. The package includes a collection of demonstration CD titles and costs £151. Both upgrade kits are available from Silica who can be contacted on 081-309-1111.

Turning Japanese

Infogrames are about to enter the education market with the imminent release of their Multimedia Language System range of CD products. These products cover German, French, Japanese, Spanish and English and will be available in two age group categories – from four years upwards and nine years to adult. Budding linguists can contact Infogrames on 071-738-8199.

Dylan to sue Apple

Ageing rock and roll veteran Bob Dylan is taking legal action against Apple Computers. The singer/songwriter claims that Apple are marketing their new software product 'Dylan' as if it were a CD recording, and that they misrepresented the facts (lied) in order to register the product with the US Patents and Trademarks office.

Apple claims that the name 'Dylan' was purely an in-house codename for the product used by its development team. Meanwhile, American developers The Graphix Zone have signed a deal with Sony Music Entertainment to produce a CD-ROM based on Dylan's music.

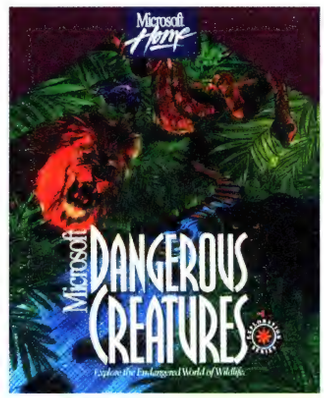
Spielberg joins Knowledge Adventure

Steven Spielberg is to collaborate with multimedia production company, Knowledge Adventure, famous for their successful 3D Adventure series of CD-based products. Mr Spielberg, who will be co-operating with Knowledge Adventure on their future educational products, is said to have made an investment in the company, although the extent of his investment was not disclosed to the press.

At a recent press conférence, Mr Spielberg was quoted as saying "I've been following the growth of the multimedia software industry with great interest. In particular I've been impressed with the work being done at Knowledge Adventure... I'm anxious to participate in innovative, enriching educational software." The UK distributors of Knowledge Adventure's products are Guildsoft and they can be contacted on 0752-895-100.

Big scary animals

Microsoft recently launched the latest in their Home series – Dangerous Creatures, a multimedia edutainment package which explores the word of dangerous animals. The CD features over 250 of Mother Nature's nastiest creations, and includes more than 100 video sequences as well as over 800 still photographs of these beasties. Dangerous Creatures comes with a free sheet of jolly nice stickers and should be in the shops by the time you read this.



Waste of time

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of The Monty Python TV series, ex-Python, Terry Gilliam has teamed up with interactive software producers, 7th Level to produce 'A Complete Waste of Time'. This package includes an interactive comedy show, a game – 'The Secret to Intergalactic Success' with real prizes to be won, and a Desktop Pythonizer – a customisation tool to "give your computer a personality (then at least one of you will have one!)."

If you wish to "waste a great chunk of your life and never get it back", more info can be obtained from Longman Logotron, the package's distributors, on 0223-425-558.

Koran on CD-ROM

For the first time ever, the holy book of the Islamic religion is available on CD-ROM. The Koran, which dates from the year 1278, was copied from a manuscript held in Bulgaria's National Library. The CD, priced at $69 is being

published by Politronics Multimedia Ltd, a Bulgarian company, who hope to sell the product across Europe. The chairman of Politronics said "The idea emerged during a meeting we had with a businessman from Saudi Arabia."

Time Warner to release classics

Hans Christian Anderson's Thumbelina is to be launched on CD-ROM in November this year. Based on the new Warner Brothers film of the classic fairytale, Thumbelina's Giant Book of Adventures will feature Don Bluth's animation and the movie's soundtrack by Barry Manilow. Also on the way from Time Warner Interactive is a CD-ROM adaptation of Prokofiev's Peter and The Wolf, which will feature work by the renowned animator Chuck Jones.

Porn overlords university mainframe

An engineering student at the University of Wales downloaded so much hard-core pornographic material from bulletin boards in the United States that the machine, unable to cope with the strain, overloaded and shut itself down for two days. Robert Barnes, the University's Admin Secretary, said "The abundance and profusion of the graphic material he invited into the system simply took up too much space, and it overloaded." The un-named student in question is reported to have been severely reprimanded.

New company launches barrage

The latest company to join the ever swelling ranks of multimedia suppliers is the newly formed CD Vision. With a launch catalogue of 5 CD-ROM products and no less than 40 Video CDs, the newcomers certainly have no intention of starting off small. Their new CD-ROM titles include CIA – The Secret Files, The Bolshoi Ballet and Crime Files, which will all be priced between £29.99 and £49.99. The CD movies cover a wide range of subjects such as martial arts, music, children's entertainment and health and fitness. These titles start at £9.99 each. CD Vision are on 0181-759-0005.

CHARTS

Moving on up | *No change* | *Moving on down* | *Brand new entry*

CD-ROM GAMES

1	(1)	Theme Park	89%	Electronic Arts	£44.99
2	(4)	Rebel Assault	85%	US Gold	£45.99
3	(6)	Encarta	NA%	Microsoft	£99.99
4	(9)	Sam & Max	83%	US Gold	£45.99
5	(NE)	Journeyman Project	70%	Gametek	£39.99
6	(NE)	TFX	90%	Ocean	£44.99
7	(3)	Frontier: Elite 2	86%	Gametek	£39.99
8	(8)	Ishar 2	NA%	Simarils	£9.99
9	(NE)	Day of the Tentacle	88%	US Gold	£44.99
10	(5)	Outpost	86%	Sierra Online	£49.99

ONE YEAR AGO TODAY

1	(6)	Day of the Tentacle	88%	US Gold	£44.99
2	(5)	X-Wing	82%	US Gold	£49.99
3	(2)	Imperial Pursuit	NA%	US Gold	£19.99
4	(4)	Fields of Glory	NA%	MicroProse	£44.99
5	(1)	Syndicate	91%	Electronic Arts	£44.99
6	(7)	Flashback	86%	US Gold	£37.99
7	(8)	Tornado	88%	DI	£44.99
8	(3)	Sensi Soccer 92/93	83%	Renegade	£32.99
9	(9)	Premier Manager	80%	Gremlin	£29.99
10	(NE)	Links 386 Pro	87%	US Gold	£45.99

FULL PRICE

1	(5)	Sim City 2000	90%	Maxis	£39.99
2	(4)	Frontier: Elite 2	86%	Gametek	£39.99
3	(1)	TIE Fighter	95%	Virgin	£44.99
4	(3)	Theme Park	89%	Electronic Arts	£44.99
5	(2)	Lemmings 2	NA%	Psygnosis	£34.99
6	(8)	X-Wing	92%	US Gold	£45.99
7	(NE)	Space Simulator	NA%	Microsoft	£39.99
8	(14)	IndyCar Racing	91%	Virgin	£44.99
9	(12)	Flight Simulator v.5	65%	Microsoft	£39.99
10	(6)	FIFA Soccer	86%	Electronic Arts	£39.99
11	(NE)	Overlord	80%	Virgin	£39.99
12	(17)	TFX	90%	Ocean	£44.99
13	(11)	Doom	90%	iD Software	£34.99
14	(NE)	Gabriel Knight	88%	Sierra Online	£44.99
15	(7)	Genesia	87%	Mindscape	£44.99
16	(NE)	Brian Lara's Cricket	70%	Audiogenic	£29.99
17	(9)	Premier Manager 2	76%	Gremlin	£34.99
18	(NE)	Outpost	86%	Sierra Online	£49.99
19	(NE)	Aces Over Europe	NA%	Sierra Online	£44.99
20	(NE)	Award Winners – Gold	90%	Empire	£34.99

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CD32

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EXPOSURE INDEX

Whatever tickles your fancy, we've got the titbit for you! We've got the first peeks at four games from all corners of the gaming globe: a horrific adventure, a rubber-burning stock-car sim, a futuristic flight shoot'em-up, a hilarious graphic adventure, as well as a sweeping statement of Interplay's hopes for the future. These are the silicon specials which we all hope will be spilling out of our stockings this Christmas. So leave these pages in clear view of (rich) loved ones.

INSIDE

HARVESTER P24

Merit Studios' addition to the growing band of horror-based adventures follows tradition with a tale of a small town gone mad, bad and dangerous to live in.

INTERPLAY P20

A cornucopia of gaming delights is due from Interplay this winter. We focus on *Cyberia*, *Kingdom* and *Descent*. The New Generation of gaming is here (almost).

NASCAR RACING P26

The first racing game in SVGA looks a stunner. Sadly you'll need a Pentium if you want to see it in all its glory. it's going to be an expensive Christmas.

NOVASTORM P32

Psygnosis make a hurried name change after John Leslie steals theirs for his TV show. *Novastorm (ex-Scavenger IV)* is reincarnated with new, improved gameplay.

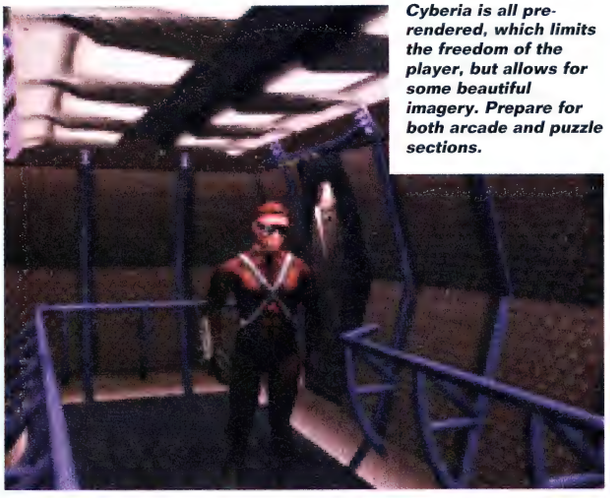
SIMON THE SORCEROR 2 ..... P30

Adventuresoft think you can't get enough of a good thing. From these early glimpses of *Simon the Sorceror 2*, they could be right.

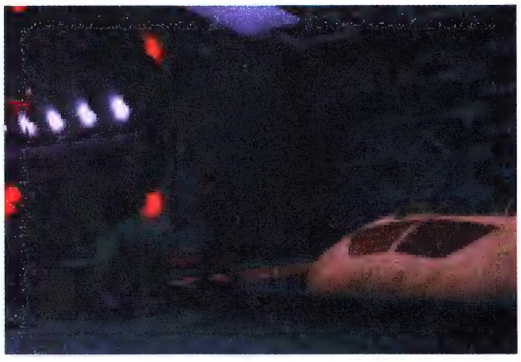
exposure

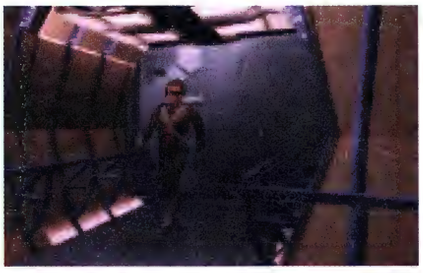
COMING SOON FROM INTERPLAY: Dungeon Master 2: Skull Keep; Cyberia; Stonekeep; Mario Teaches Typing; Kingdom: The Far Reaches; Descent; Sim Ant CD; Voyeur; Zombie Dinos From The Planet Deltoid; Space Federation; Star Trek: Space Academy.

With the haunting *Cyberia*, the deathly *Kingdom* and the deadly *Descent*, Interplay look set to rock the gaming world to its knees – again. Derek Delafuente reports on one of the most forward thinking of American companies, and revels in their breathtaking new games.

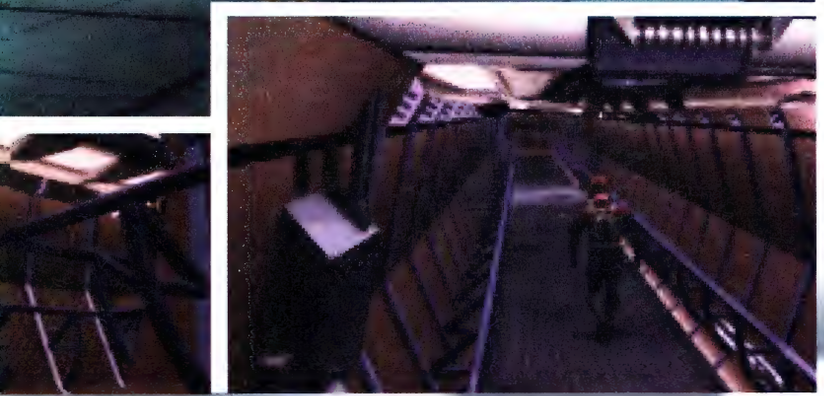


Cyberia is all pre-rendered, which limits the freedom of the player, but allows for some beautiful imagery. Prepare for both arcade and puzzle sections.





Interplay



RPM racing was Interplay's first game, a product remarkable in only one way – it was started and finished in less than four months. Nowadays, Interplay spend just a little bit longer on their games (*Dungeon Master 2* has been in development for years) and they excel with gameplay and graphics, rather than the cheapness/speed of their production. Indeed, games like *Stonekeep* have been whetting the appetites of onlookers for so many moons that Interplay's Next Generation have arrived, long before the first wave have shown even early signs of being released.

To get a closer look at the future of Interplay, PC Power visited them in their Oxford home, where Peter Bilotta, former Mirrorsoft head, has now taken residence, ensuring that Interplay are a European force to be reckoned with. There is even a strong possibility that sooner, rather than later, the European division of Interplay will have its own R'n'D team up and running. World watch out.

Cyberia

Cyberia will probably be the next big Interplay release. It's set in the future where mankind suddenly finds itself on the brink of destruction. Clever souls that our future-selves are, we saw the inevitability of a war, with nations continually striving to better each other, spending huge proportions of GDP on the military, and the technology to aid them. The only solution, the future believed, was for multi-national disarmament – the demilitarisation of the world. Unfortunately, the agreement came too late. By the time the world decided to give up its huge arsenal of weapons, a 'Doomsday' device had been built, and stolen by terrorists. It is your job to recapture said device – before the world is destroyed with the simple touch of a button.

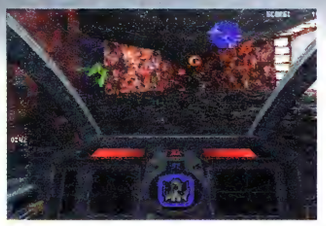
Cyberia is an amalgam of state-of-the-art graphics techniques combined with differing game elements to create a very refreshing, novel game. The blend of cinematic and action sequences that cut into the game actually add to the overall feel of the plot and give it a lot more continuity than previous games of its ilk. Shots of a character walking though corridors a la *Creature Shock* are some of the most fluid and realistic ever seen on the PC. They've been achieved by using a variety of camera angles, combined with video footage using the blue screen process – the actors are filmed against a blue screen before being incorporated into the game by being rendered and 'touched up'. The effect is often astounding.

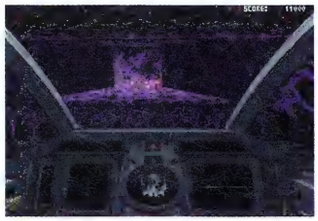
There are three main game components in *Cyberia* – puzzles, action scenes and role playing/adventure themes. You assume the lead player, moving around a vast world, interacting with your environs, picking up objects, talking to people, etc. Special VR glasses enable the hero to scan any particular area he/she wishes, and the subtle, intertwined game elements (of arcade action, puzzles, etc.) give an almost unique feel to *Cyberia*, coming close to that Nirvana of the interactive movie – or so the makers claim.

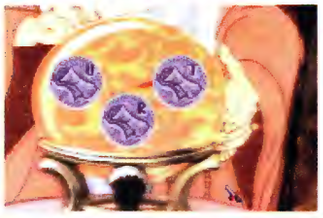
The music in *Cyberia* comes from Thomas Dolby's ambient, freakish headspace. The game is full of digitised sound FX and voices, used to heighten the already high level of tension within the game.

Cyberia also features full light sourcing, accurate shadowing and beautifully detailed landscapes. Whether you're an action player or a fan of strategy, *Cyberia* aims to please all. From flying a state-of-the-art aircraft (where the simple objective is to blast the enemy away) all the way

"By the time the world decided to give up its weapons, a 'Doomsday' device had been built, and stolen by terrorists. It's your job to recapture said device..."







Above: Descent is Doom with a twist – at least that's what the makers are claiming. The game will feature over 30 levels, set within a twisting, winding mine shaft full to the brim with vile, murderous, morphing aliens. Unfortunately, the game's not in a position to show any of these brutes as yet – but we'll bring you pics as we get them.

Kingdom is Dragon's Lair and Space Ace – only with the gameplay. It's a graphic adventure, par excellence, cram-packed with light and dark magic, knights, goblins and orcs – and, of course, that obligatory amulet, now broken up into five pieces, that need to be glued together if the world is to be saved. Naturally it's you who is to be sent out on a cold, dark night to find the mythical super glue.

to fiendishly difficult puzzles, *Cyberia* hopes to have it all...

... especially speed. Because all the flying sequences are predetermined, Interplay have been freed from the constraints of having to create a fully explorable 3-D world, which means they've been able to create a right roller-coaster of a game. This does have its downside, of course. Action might come thick and fast, but all you can do to 'save the world' is align your guns, and squeeze the trigger.

Undoubtedly the most ingenious thing about *Cyberia* is its customisation option. You can set up play from a scale of one to five, so whether you prefer an interactive adventure with puzzles or whether you're more into arcade action, by adjusting the numbers you "can have it your way".

The mix of arcade action with cerebral puzzle sections might sound remarkably similar to SCI's *The Lawnmower Man*. The similarity is, in fact, more than superficial. One puzzle consists of being shown a circuit board and having to ascertain the correct link lines for the board to be disabled. It's a case of looking at the circuit diagram and spotting where the major junctions are and hoping that you can unravel the numerous intertwining tracks. *The Lawnmower Man*, I believe, featured a similar problem.

This similarity isn't that surprising when you think about it. Both games use similar technology and so both development teams are up against much the same sort of problems – CD technology, processors unable to generate 3D Studio quality environments on the fly, etc, etc. The mix of gameplay styles is perhaps the only way to get around these problems, to embed some element of gameplay in the game somehow. It's not ideal, but it's the best we can hope for at the moment. And it does make for a stunning looking game.

Descent

From the creators of Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* and *Ultimate I* and *II*, comes anther game in the much plagiarised form of *Doom*, albeit one with some great new ideas and a graphical style which will certainly set it apart from the crowd.

In *Descent* the player is plunged straight into the atmospheric and sinister environments of the twisting mazes of a mine shaft. There are over 30 levels of arcade action set deep within a 3-D world where 360 degree rotation, textured-mapped passages and, above all else, *speed*, make this a game to check out.

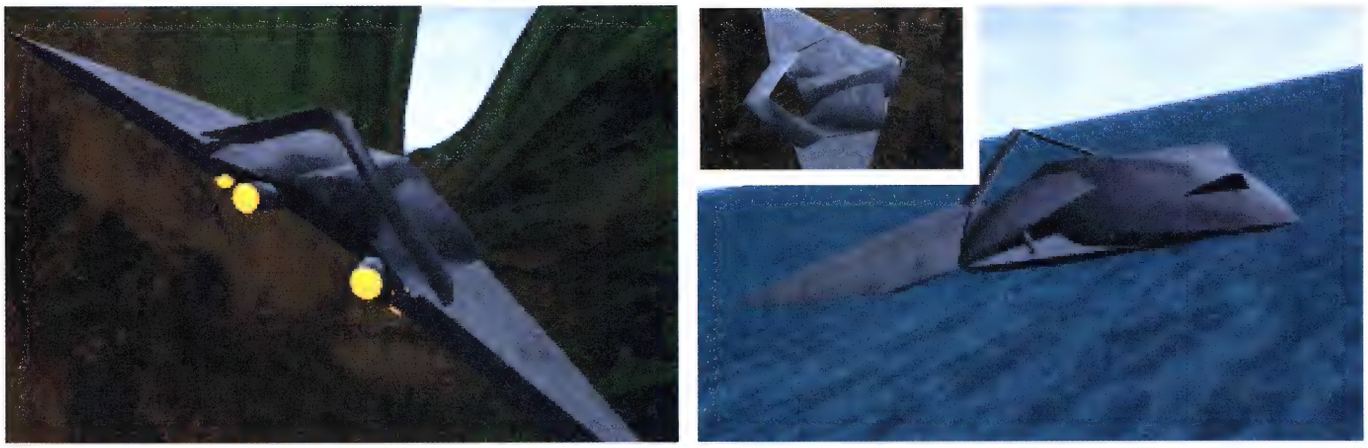
Descent, like *Doom*, comes with a network option, which means that up to four players can play together. The aim of the game is to confront a "robotic menace" and destroy each of its command centres. The game features such audio-visual delights as "pounding rock music", alien morphing, and a wide array of different types of gun-toting monsters.

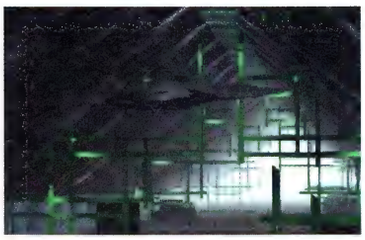
As in all other first-person-perspective adventures, the game features a whole host of extras to supplement your health, and to boost your much needed fire-power. Where the game differs slightly is with the sophistication of its graphics engine – at one point in the game you'll find yourself hanging precariously upside down while aliens, clinging to the walls, will try and drag you into the abyss beneath you.

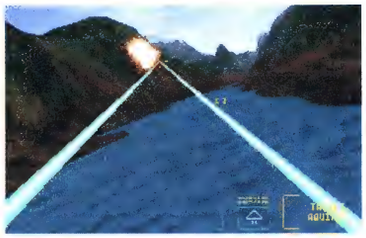
Light sourcing has also been implemented all the way through the game and shooting along a tunnel will light it up as the bullet moves along its lengths. Quite stunning.

"Interplay have been freed from the constraints of having to create a fully explorable, 3-D world in order to create a right roller-coaster of a game."

Exposure: Interplay







And, finally, back to Cyberia again. This game just looks sooo good that we had to add these final, glorious screen shots. What a shame that your path through this city and canyon is pre-determined. At least you've got two views to switch between – internal and external.

Descent will, hopefully, be finished by December. PC Power waits with baited breath.

Kingdom

Kingdom is perhaps the most impressive looking title from Interplay's Next Generation of games. Those that have seen *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* couldn't help but be impressed with their graphics, but their gameplay left anyone and everyone who came into contact with them cold. Here you have a "fully animated multimedia adventure that combines multiple plotlines, character interaction and full player control with some of the most impressive animated sequences seen" – i.e. you get the gameplay as well as the graphics.

Kingdom is, essentially, a massive, full-length, animated game. There are more than 400 Mb of animation and pre-rendered full motion video. Interplay have also used professional actors to provide the voice-overs for the characters, bringing them to life in the process.

The (clichéd) storyline is as follows: long ago an amulet known as The Hand was shattered in five pieces and hidden though the Five Kingdoms. Dark magic followed, spreading across the land like a swarm of poisonous snakes, strangling everything in their path. Out of the chaos came the evil Wizard Torlok. Cities and kingdoms fell into the darkness as the Servants Of Evil began to take control of once fair and proud cities.

Now the fate of the Five Kingdoms rests on the shoulders of a young man (YOU!), the last of the Argent Kings. To fulfil an ancient prophecy, your challenge is to seek out and rejoin the shattered pieces of the amulet, reclaiming the magic of the old days and restoring freedom to a doomed world in the process.

Kingdom, like the best graphic adventures, features a simple point-'n'-click interface devised to quickly draw the player into the game. At the start of the game you'll be presented with a large map of the world, with a number of locations pin-pointed upon it. To go to any one of these places all you have to do is click on them. By clicking on the map in this way you can constantly move between settings, picking up objects, giving them to some of the cast and obtaining information as you progress through the game.

Unlike *Dragon's Lair's* passive film footage, *Kingdom* is fully interactive throughout and you must watch, look, learn and listen as the story unfolds.

"*Kingdom* is, essentially, a massive, full-length, animated game. There are over 400Mb of animation and pre-rendered full motion video..."

An animated intro for each of the missions will give the player a good understanding of what is required for a particular mission.

The narrative in the game constantly provides a backdrop for all the players' actions, and provides hints about what to do next. If you missed a particular message, two on-screen buttons allow you to cycle through anything you've been told, allowing you to pick up on things you might have missed earlier.

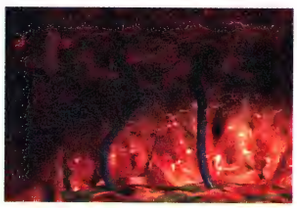
Like many adventure games nowadays, the puzzles are pitched at quite a low level. The aim of *Kingdom's* designers has been to make the game as enjoyable an experience as possible, and to minimise the chances of anyone being stuck for too long. Seasoned gameplayers get compensation in the form of the size of this game – huge, apparently.

Kingdom – The Far Regions is down for a November release. Expect a full-blooded review next issue.

● **DEREK DELAFUENTE**

e x p o s u r e

Harvester PUBLISHER: Merit Studios CONTACT: 091-385-7755 DEVELOPER: In House	RELEASE DATE: November PRICE: £54.95 MINIMUM SPEC: 486; 4Mb RAM; SVGA; double-speed CD drive.



There's bowels to the left and a decaying lavatory below. For all its surface gloss, Harvester isn't nice.

Harvester

Prepare to be very very, very, scared. *Harvester's* a comin'. Dave Westley is very brave.

Merit Studios' great white hope of the future is *Harvester*, an action/adventure/puzzle game centring on one pure emotion – fear. At the last two ECTSs, its stunning Silicon Graphic imagery has stopped by-passers dead; the moody, dark dackdrops setting a foreground scene of violence and death – pure evil juxtaposed on a 'nice', twee, middle-American town.

The author of the game is G.P. Austin, responsible for writing *Wing Commander 2&3*, *Strike Commander*, *Privateer* and the soon to be released *Dr Radiaki*. He's taken his influence from the likes of David Lynch and Alain-Grillet, mixed them up and come up with one of the most original storylines in recent years. It goes something like this.

You've lived in Harvest all of your seventeen years. It's a nice little town – picket fences and sprinklers, laundry flapping from clothes-lines and old men playing checkers outside the barbers shop, fanning away in unified motion the heat of endless summer. All in all, you believe you've had a good life. The problem is, you can't remember any of it.

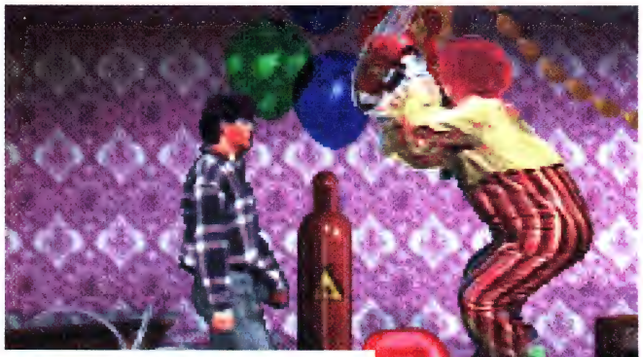
Your memory is a total blank. You attempt to communicate this to people around you, but they seem unconcerned, incredulous. They accuse you of teasing them; even your mother thinks that you're trying to scare your little brother with weird stories. But you know that your confusion is all too real.

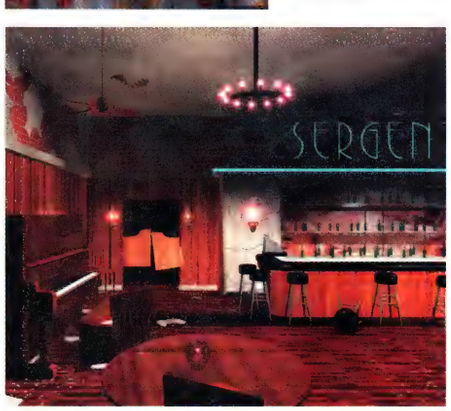
Goodnight, sweetheart

After all, plenty about the town is confusing. As you wander about Harvest, you find that it's a curiously tiny town, too small for all of the people that you meet, you discover a number of things about yourself. You live at home with your perfect family, and are engaged to be married to your high school sweetheart. The town, and its people, are so normal that they border on the bizarre, as if you had stepped into a Norman Rockwell painting... or a near-perfect forgery executed by a madman...

The idea of situating evil within the comforting setting of a small town isn't, of course, a new one – indeed it's almost a cliché in the world of horror. But then, this isn't a book, it's a game, and everything's virgin territory here. Austin believes *Harvester* to be something special, something much more exciting than any possible game within the tried-and-tested genres of the flight sim or the beat'em-up. "*Harvester* is much more my own 'personal' project than any other games I've worked upon. It's not the product of some marketing committee seeking to exploit a niche; the idea for the project originated from me, and reflects my personality and sensibilities far more than any flight sim ever could. Because of that, it's quite bizarre and quirky. It would have never gotten past the board of directors of your typical game company. In a sense I've managed to circumvent the staid Meisters of Mediocrity, go out on a limb and create something that's not standard and safe. I guess I'm proudest of that. *Harvester's* a pure experiment. I can't wait to see how it turns out."

Yet there are some resemblances to other games of the day with the likes of *Phantasmagoria*, *11th Hour*, etc. also using fear as their primary emotion. I asked whether this was a reflection of the success of *7th Guest*, or whether there was something more to it than that? "Since *7th Guest* wasn't scary I'd have to say there's something more to it. Actually, the horror genre is under-represented in computer





Left: In some scenes you gain control over the arms and legs of your digitised doppleganger which enables you to enter into the fray of battle. You'd better make sure that your reflexes are quick, otherwise you might have to start all over again – unless you had the foresight to save your game before the battle, that is!

"The idea of situating evil within the comforting setting of a small town isn't, of course, a new one. Indeed, it's almost a cliché for horror writers to do so. But then this isn't a book, it's a game, and everything is virgin territory here. Austin believes *Harvester* to be something special, something that's incredibly exciting."

gaming. You get a number of silly haunted house things, all with derivative plots, but horror? I decided to attempt to make such a game because, instead of dressing up an RPG with vampires instead of trolls and calling it a horror game, I wanted to see if I could take things further and produce something really disturbing."

Explicit

Within the game itself you manoeuvre yourself about the town from a high, top-down view. When you click on a bulding you enter it, and the game cuts to a rendered view of the interior. You'll see yourself in the scene, as well as other characters and objects. You can interact with these objects, or converse with the people that you find. During conversations, the game cuts to close-ups of the characters and plays interactive conversations, which allow you to choose your responses and explore different lines of enquiry. "In this sense, *Harvester* is something of an RPG and something of a Sierra-syle puzzle game. You manipulate objects to solve physical puzzles, or gather and use certain objects to affect other characters (i.e. blackmail). You can also engage in arcade-like combat with certain characters and creatures, which can be controlled with either the keyboard or the mouse."

Preventing this from being just another adventure game is that storyline and those graphics. A cursory glance at the pictures around you should be enough to convince you that Austin really does want to scare you. "*Harvester* is intended for an adult audience. We don't have a specific rating system in place industry-wide yet, to my knowledge, but we intend *Harvester* to be very explicit – this game isn't for kids." I asked whether Austen had learned anything about how to stage events to generate the emotions he was trying to achieve. The answer was a definite no. "Actually it's quite the reverse. I've applied my knowledge of how to stage cinematic sequences to *Harvester*, rather than acquiring this skill by working on the game. My background is in film and so I instigated the project knowing what I wanted to achieve in terms of effect. Working around the constraints of an open-ended game to orchestrate certain sequences has been one of the greatest challenges involved in *Harvester*."

"People always ask me 'is the distinction between film and game disappearing at all with the increased realism of computer imagery?', yet the answer is no – for the reason above. A film is essentially a linear experience. Even in those films that eschew linear storylines (eg Annie Hall), the presentation of the non-linear storyline is presented in a linear fashion, the order of the seemingly random assortment of shots predetermined by the editor and presented in the same sequence at every screening. A game is generally much more open-ended than a film, allowing the player to explore its depths at his/her own pace. This makes it difficult for a designer to achieve the same manipulative effects as a director."

Quaking

Yet, from what we've seen of the game so far, it looks as though Austen has done pretty well – the two CDs the game will come on this December are almost guaranteed to have people quaking in their boots. I, for one, will be playing with the lights dimmed, but making sure that my girlfriend is next door, ready and waiting to run in with a big stick shoud the bogeyman come out from under the bed!

DAVID WESTLEY

e x p o s u r e

NASCAR Racing PUBLISHER: Virgin CONTACT: 081-960-2255 DEVELOPER: Papyrus	RELEASE DATE: December PRICE: TBA MINIMUM SPEC: 486SX-25Mhz. Pentium recommended.

***NASCAR Racing* looks set to be become the most realistic racing sim ever – visually and mechanistically. Dave Westley hitches a ride.**

NASCAR Racing

Papyrus's pedigree for racing games is unquestionable; *Indianapolis 500*, born in the dark ages of 1989, is still, for many, *the* definitive simulator, while *IndyCar Racing* has been the state-of-the-art race game for the past year. Now, however, its hegemony is about to be challenged – but not by any other company. Papyrus are to further their lead with NASCAR Racing, a SVGA simulator to challenge the likes of the stunning, dazzling *Virtua/Daytona Racing* in the arcades.

With this knowledge, PC Power crossed the transAtlantic highway to talk to the game's Development Leader, Adam Levesque. Their Massachusetts office had hit the eye of the storm, the quiet before the final rush to complete the game began. It was, quite simply, the perfect time to strike with our questions.

PCP: How long have you been working on *NASCAR Racing*?
AL: We've been developing the game since Christmas '93. The first few months were spent working on the design of the project. We didn't start any programming until we had a good grasp of how everything was going to fall into place. That way there is less time wasted at the end of the project doing things which were out of the scope of the original design.

PCP: What exactly does NASCAR stand for?
AL: NASCAR is an acronym for 'National Association for StockCar Auto Racing.' It was formed by Bill France Sr in 1949 and is the governing body of the sport. Basically, StockCar racing is very similar to the Touring Car series in Europe. The machines are stock bodies which have been fitted over a racing engine and chassis. In the early days of the sport the cars were truly 'stock'. Racers used to drive the cars to the track, drive them in the race, and then drive them home again. Naturally, it's quite different these days – virtually nothing on the car is stock.

I think some people outside the US might be turned off by the fact that most of the tracks in *NASCAR Racing* are ovals. This could be because they don't have an appreciation of just how very demanding these tracks are. Just because they are all ovals doesn't mean that they are all the same. Bristol International Raceway is a half mile oval with 36 degrees of banking in the turns – 36 degrees! It's a very intense track to drive on. It takes all of the skill you can muster just to finish the race. At a track like Martinsville, which is another half mile oval, the banking is just 12 degrees. So not only do you have to use a much different set-up, you also have to drive a very different style of race.

One of the main features of StockCar racing is how close the cars run with each other. You can watch a Formula 1 race and the leader could be so far ahead they don't see another driver for the rest of the race. In NASCAR, there are upwards of 40 cars on the track and they often drive inches from each other. This, combined with the fact that these cars are set up on a knife-edge of drive-ability, leads to some very exciting racing indeed.

Though largely unfamiliar with NASCAR and StockCar Racing, I hope our European fans of *IndyCar* will give it a try.

PCP: What kind of effect will the fact that NASCAR Racing is totally different to IndyCar Racing have on the gameplay of *NASCAR Racing*?
AL: NASCAR Racing is a greatly differing driving experience compared to IndyCar. The car feels and reacts much differently. From my own personal point of view, going close to 250 mph around Michigan in IndyCar is exciting, but there's something much more exciting, bordering on scary, driving a StockCar around Talladega at speeds over 200 mph. You want to say 'Oh Sh**! This car shouldn't be going this fast'. It feels like it's on the ragged edge and one false move could send you into the wall – which is the way it actually is. You don't get the same feeling in IndyCar because the car was made to go that fast. I mean, imagine going

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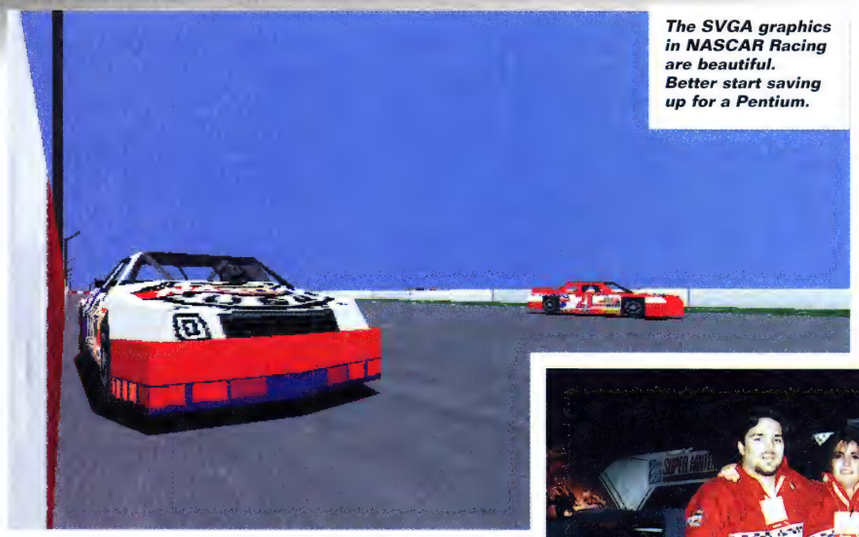
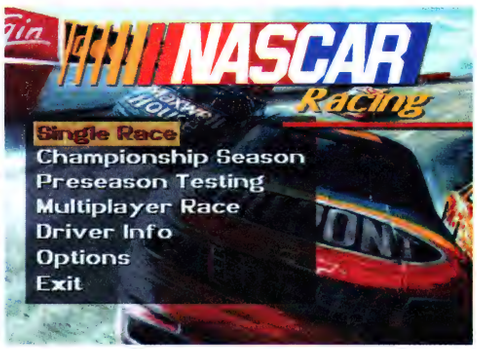


The SVGA graphics in NASCAR Racing are beautiful. Better start saving up for a Pentium.



Above: The NASCAR Racing team pose in front of a real NASCAR car, borrowed for the CES in Chicago. Left: Dino's driving skills on a good day.

close to 200 mph in your car. That's the kind of feeling you get driving a StockCar at high speeds. We just hope that we have managed to capture that thrill and excitement.

PCP: What are the improvements over *IndyCar* technologically/visually?
AL: The most obvious thing is the SVGA (640x480) graphics. You just get a much clearer sense of the cars and the tracks. You can see much further down the track and there's not the pixelation that you get in low res (320x200). It is like a totally different game. Once people see the game in hi-res, they won't want to go back.

We've also completely rebuilt the AI. We wanted to make sure we corrected some of the problems with *IndyCar* and made some improvements. It's one of the most difficult problems, technically, that we have had to deal with. So much can go wrong with the AI and it can be so hard to find out what is going wrong that it makes getting the AI right a real challenge.

Obviously, the physics are different from *IndyCar*. We went from modelling a 1,500lb 'small aircraft' with a lot of down-force to a 3,500lb behemoth with very little down-force. People are going to have to realise that, while they may be a great driver in *IndyCar*, *NASCAR* is going to take some practise.

One other thing we wanted to do was get the crashing correct. In StockCar racing there is often quite a bit of contact between other cars – 'rubbing' is the technical name. This happens most at the shorter, slower tracks. So, combined with the fact that every finishing place in a race gets points, that means that at the end of the race you might see a number of different cars driving around in various states of damage. For the game, we've worked on getting the look of the crashes correct. When you hit a car various pieces of it will dent and fly off. This all depends upon the force and location of the impact. Things like the aerodynamics and suspension will be affected by the crash, so the car might not drive as well as it did at the start of the race. People will have more fun than ever driving backwards!

PCP: I saw that the recommended spec for playing the game in SVGA mode was a Pentium with 8Mb of RAM. Isn't that pushing it a little?
AL: Well, yes it is pushing it a little. We realise that the majority of people will play *NASCAR* in low-res. That's why we've made everything as good as possible in that mode. One fear I had going into the project was that everyone would latch onto the SVGA mode and not care about VGA. We've made sure that that doesn't happen.

Because of the competition you always have to up the ante. If you just stay the same and don't try to improve you'll get steam-rollered.

The important thing to keep in mind is that as machine prices drop and better, faster machines become available, people will be able to rediscover *NASCAR Racing* – because, as I've said, the SVGA version is a completely different game.

PCP: My only criticism of the brilliant *IndyCar* was that often it was impossible to know when a corner was coming up – things merged together too much in the distance. Do you agree?
AL: That merging has to do with the screen resolution. In VGA, there just aren't enough pixels to display things that small on screen. The problem is exaggerated when those objects are texture-mapped. One of the things we've done is to offer the SVGA mode. The player can also turn the texture-mapping off.

"Because of the competition you always have to keep upping the ante. If you stay the same, and don't try to improve on your last project, you'll just get steam-rollered."

Exposure: NASCAR

I have noticed the effect, but I think I've got used to it. Once you learn the tracks you learn to rely on braking markers at the side of the track, whether it's a billboard, bridge or other object. This helps you remember exactly where the turn is and when you should brake and start turning. All it takes is practise, practise, practise.

PCP: Will you also be able to get external views in the in-game action in *NASCAR Racing*?
AL: We have added another driving mode in *NASCAR Racing*. It's a view from above and behind the car, a la *Virtua Racing*. This will give the players a whole new perspective on the track and what is going on around them. Because the cars drive so close to each other, it will be easier to see the action around your car, but it won't necessarily be easier to drive. Personally, I much prefer the in-car mode. I like to feel that I'm actually in the car, driving in the race, and not just a spectator. But it is something other people wanted. I mean, almost every time I go to the arcade and watch people playing *Virtua/Daytona Racing*, they are more often than not using the outside drive mode. So it is another option the driver has available to him/her.

PCP: How involved are Papyrus with real IndyCar and NASCAR Racing – do they actually like the sports?
AL: When I first started at Papyrus a number of years ago I thought auto-racing was the most boring sport in the world. I just didn't understand what the big deal was. Well, when I first came to Papyrus I started playing *Indianapolis 500*. At first I wasn't very good at it at all, but Dave Kaemmer helped me along, showing me different things and explaining their relevance to real racing. Slowly, I started to get better – there's this stubborn streak in me that refuses to give up. I can still remember the first race I won. It was only a 10-lapper but I was pushing and pushing and pushing and finally caught Mario Andretti on turn four of the final lap, passed him and won the race. It was a great thrill for me. I have never had an experience like that from any other computer game. From then on I've been hooked on racing. I actually took to NASCAR more than any other form of racing. I really like the personalities and the excitement of the race being in doubt until the very end.

Since then, Dave has managed to convert most of the development team to IndyCar and NASCAR racing fans. These days Dave and I joke around every Monday morning about the races we watched over the weekend. I complain about how boring the F1 race was while Dave takes the completely opposite point of view.

I hope that the love and excitement we have for the sport comes out in our products. I firmly believe that it was David Kaemmer's love of racing which made *IndyCar* such a good game. I think the same will be true for *NASCAR*.

PCP: What kind of reaction have you had from professional racing drivers? Do you get professionals to play-test your games? How do you know if a game is realistic?
AL: Well this is very interesting. In fact, Dave Kaemmer developed the physics for *Indianapolis* and *IndyCar* without any input from professional drivers. I think that that's quite remarkable considering the level of detail the physics had in those products. Since the release of *IndyCar* we have heard of some drivers playing both games. We took a trip this year to the first NASCAR race at Darlington, SC. We walked by the Maxwell House trailer of Bobby Labonte. I had heard on-line that he played *IndyCar* and really liked it. We approached him and he laughed and invited us into his trailer. We talked for a little bit about *IndyCar* and the possibilities for the *NASCAR* game. Later we talked to Andy Petree, who is the crew chief for Winston Cup Champion, Dale Earnhardt, and he pulled us into the trailer, opened a draw and pulled out a copy of *IndyCar*. We've heard of some drivers playing the game to learn about tracks they haven't raced on before!

I think that the best story comes from this year's CES show in Chicago. For the announcement of *NASCAR Racing* we hired a show car off NASCAR driver, Jeff Gordon. A really nice guy from the team brought up the car and actually worked the stand with us to answer any questions about the car. It turns out he was a NASCAR driver from the early seventies to the mid-eighties. After watching me drive around Michigan for a few hours he asked me if he could give it a try. He wasn't very familiar with computers and never played games. At first he kept hitting the wall and driving in the grass. But after a few laps he started to do much better and by lap 5 his turning times were as fast as mine. I was pretty shocked. He said that at first he started driving like everyone else he had seen play the game, just jam on the gas and go. But once he realised where he was and started driving like he really would at Michigan he started to turn laps fast. That really blew me away. It made me feel really good about the work we had done and the game's progress.

PCP: What other games have you got in the pipeline? Will you do a Formula 1 game?
AL: Right now we're looking at our options. I think we have a really good core racing system which we can keep on improving to make better and better games. I think we will always do racing games of some sort as long as we are in business. However, what our next racing game will be I can't really say at the moment.

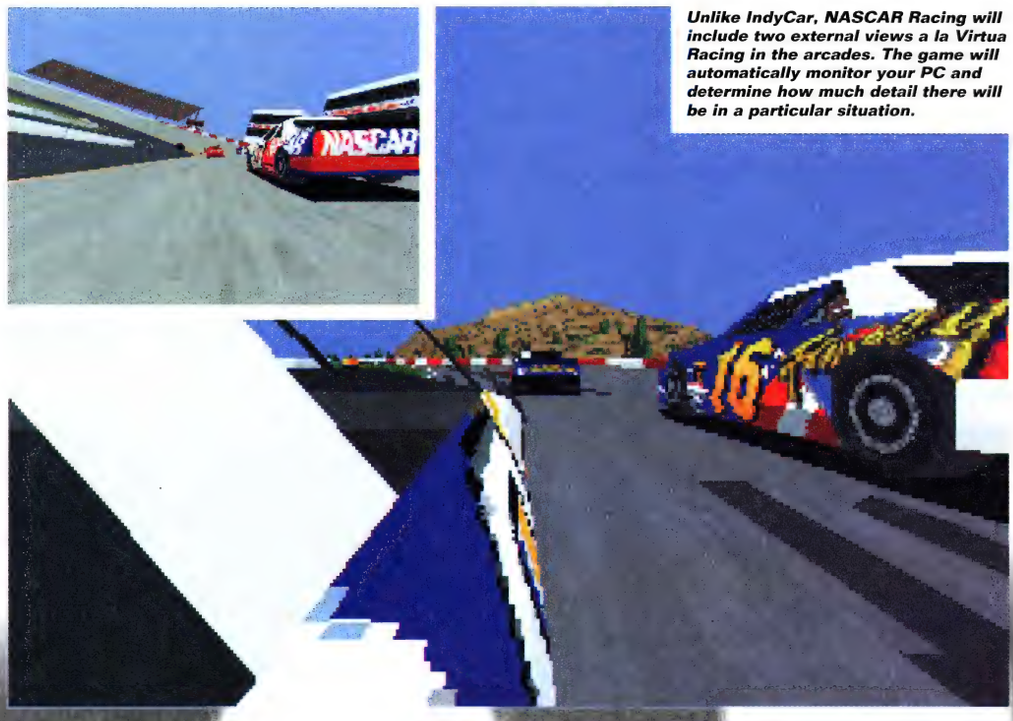
We do eventually want to expand into other genres, although what those are and when that might happen is not clear at the moment. What is clear is that our goal at Papyrus is to make quality products, whatever they may be. It really depends upon what people here are interested in. I think that for a game to be successful the people working on it must have an interest in the subject matter. That passion and interest really shows.

● **DAVE WESTLEY**

The Crew

Adam Levesque – Producer/Designer
John Wheeler – Chief Programmer
David Kraemer – Physical Modelling
Randy Cassidy – AI
Charlie Heath – Modem
Dave Miller
Celso Minetti
Matt Marsala – 3-D
David Matson – 3-D
Vladimir Starzheviskiy – 3-D
Danny Walles – 3-D
Doug McCartney – Art
Brian Mahony – Art
Charlie Bandes – Art
David Flamburis – Art
Anne-Marie Gianantoni – Marketing/PR

"One important aspect of our development process is that it is very much a team effort. Everyone has contributed to the design of *NASCAR Racing*. I think that's one of the things that will make it a successful product."
Adam Levesque, Development Leader for Papyrus' *NASCAR Racing*.



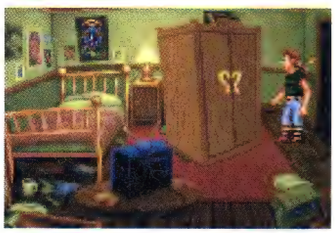
Unlike IndyCar, NASCAR Racing will include two external views a la Virtua Racing in the arcades. The game will automatically monitor your PC and determine how much detail there will be in a particular situation.

e x p o s u r e

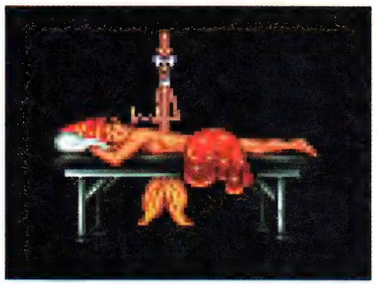
Simon the Sorcerer 2 PUBLISHER: PDQ CONTACT: 021-625-3377 DEVELOPER: Adventuresoft	RELEASE DATE: TBA PRICE: TBA MINIMUM SPEC: 386; other specs to be announced.

Simon the Sorcerer 2

***Simon the Sorcerer 2* is a moral tale of wardrobe abuse and the danger of messy pentacles. Dino Boni ought to know better.**



Above: Splish, splash, I'm taking a bath! Simon gets his back scrubbed by a dodgy-looking broom.
Above Middle: The magic wardrobe appears in Simon's room. After a bit of a moan about people dumping things in his room, Simon gets in and falls for the trap set by Sordid.
Above: As you can see, the detail that has gone into the finished backgrounds is amazing.
Top Middle: "No, I didn't spill your pint, Sir!"



Below top: Why is Simon being massaged by this magic broom? The mind boggles. Below bottom: Runt's father gets very upset when he finds his son dabbling with magic. Personally, I don't blame him!

"There will be seven man-years worth of graphics in *Simon 2*."

Adventuresoft has grown to mammoth proportions in comparison to its humble beginnings. The success of *Simon 1* has given many adventure gamesplayers a taste for the 'talkie' game, so it was only fair to give the punters more of the same – with improvements, of course.

At the end of *Simon 1*, the evil wizard Sordid is kicked into the fiery pits of Rondor and is killed. As it transpires, he is actually in Limbo, that strange place between life and death. Of course, Sordid isn't too happy with this state of affairs, so he is desperately trying to get back to the 'real' world.

The opening section of the game is set in a peasant farmer's cottage. A small character called Runt is sat in his bedroom, reading a strange book. His father walks in and asks him what he is doing. The book Runt is reading is an old magic book that he bought from an old man in the village, and of course, it turns out to be Sordid's spell book.

Any father worth his salt doesn't want his son playing around with the occult, so he grabs the book, burns it on a candle and throws it on the floor, just where Runt has scribbled a pentagram (purely for educational purposes, of course). This bizarre sequence of coincidences leads to Sordid's spirit returning, and he is after revenge. But how can he get Simon back into his world? He enlists Runt as his assistant as the screen fades out.

The next time we join this unholy duet is in Sordid's new Fortress of Doom (he's moved up in the world, and a castle is no longer big enough for his ego). Because Sordid hasn't got a body at the moment, his spirit is living inside his massive wizard's costume, making him appear even more scary than before. Using his magic powers, he creates a special wardrobe that he sends to Simon's bedroom to capture him. Sure enough, Simon's curiosity gets the better of him and he falls into the trap.

Things don't go according to plan. Instead of transporting him to Sordid's Fortress, the wardrobe plonks him outside Calypso's Magic Emporium. Simon falls out of the wardrobe, unconscious, and Calypso and his granddaughter take him in, and it's up to Simon to defeat Sordid once again.

The best part of the first *Simon* game was the humour. *Simon 2* continues this tradition. The game is full of sarcastic humour which the voices of Chris Barrie and Roger Blake carry to full effect. But is the new game going to be completely different? I asked Adventuresoft Director, Mike Woodruff, what was in store for us.

"The first major difference is that every location will now have scrolling backdrops. We're also aiming to get some animation into every screen in the game. Each screen will be part of the plot, which will negate the need for you to wander around the game until you come across a useful location. We've never yet produced a perfect product. We're always looking for ways to improve our games, and if another product uses something that we feel could be an improvement, we incorporate it into our game."

I asked Mike whether the graphics will change at all. "The style will remain much the same, but the actual graphics will be completely new. Also, the game will be much bigger than the first *Simon* adventure, so we've had to increase our workforce considerably. We have seven full-time artists working in *Simon 2* compared to the four that were working on the first version and these guys will be producing approximately seven man years worth of graphics in the finished version. That's an awful lot of pictures!"

Many of the other changes scheduled for *Simon 2* relate to the player interface and the overall gameplay. Will the changes make the game more playable? "We've changed the player interface to a certain extent. The mouse cursor now takes on the form of an icon, so that you can see what you're doing. The bottom section of the screen has been changed as well, and instead of the verbs, we're now using icons for all of the actions available in the game. The map has been expanded to a full-screen scrolling item which is complete at the start of the game. This is a version of the magic map that was found in the first game, but you don't have to discover locations before they appear on the map. This should cut down the wandering around that you find in most adventure games. There isn't a single dead location (a location that is no use to the plot) in the game. Every screen in the game has something to do with the story."

The scope for CD games is enormous, but *Simon 2* will also be released in a floppy version. With the floppy market still going strong, many publishers have reservations about treading the CD path, but Mike has a different outlook. "The floppy version should take up four or five disks compared to the Amiga's twelve, but that's mainly due to the compression we can use on the PC version. The floppy game had to be produced to cover the floppy market, but we're hoping everyone will want to play the CD version. The CD will include speech that can't be compressed onto the floppy, but apart from that, there won't be any difference in gameplay," said Mike. So Adventuresoft are firm believers in CD-ROM?

"Oh yes. I would love the floppy market to disappear tomorrow, but sadly that won't happen. Despite what many people tell you, the percentage of the market that CD-ROM holds is very small, but we hope that games like *Simon 2* will slowly make people aware of what can be done."
Let's hope he's right.

● **DINO BONI**

exposure

Novastorm
PUBLISHER: Psygnosis
CONTACT: 051-709-5755
DEVELOPER: In House

RELEASE DATE: November
PRICE: £44.99
MINIMUM SPEC: 386; single speed CD-ROM drive.

Psygnosis follow Danny Baker's lead and introduce a new, improved and whiter than white *Novastorm* (née *Scavenger IV*). The name has been changed to protect the innocent from confusing a supersonic shoot'em-up with a sad, Saturday evening TV programme.

Novastorm

Psygnosis' Chester offices house some of the cream of this top developer/publisher's talent. Led by industry veteran Kenny Everett, the Chester office is a vibrant symbol of The Future of Computer and Video Gaming. This is not, as one company supremo said, because of the stylish redbrick-and-glass open plan offices, set in beautiful Cheshire countryside, with stunning views of the Welsh hills. It is because the team see themselves as an island of creativity, with freedoms in time and ideas which enable them to create games which they believe will show a longevity and constant popularity in entertainment terms to surpass even that of Uncle Bob Monkhouse.

This group's dedication to producing a quality product (PR-speak alert!) is highlighted by the case of *Novastorm*. Emerging from the ether after only four to five months in production, this shoot'em-up first appeared on the FM Towns under the moniker of *Scavenger IV*. Although the game did well on the Japanese games market, it suffered from some flaws as a result of hurried production. Like the two little boys with their little toys, Psygnosis didn't leave their game dying on the battlefield of the games market. Instead they picked it up, brushed it down and set about healing some of its more gaping wounds. A process which has taken about 18 months in total. A company which allows such a lengthy overhaul is a rare and beautiful thing.

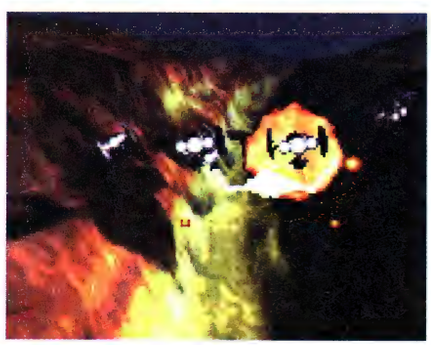
The name was changed from *Scavenger IV* to *Novastorm* only recently, supposedly to avoid confusion (or association) with the John Leslie-presented TV programme, Scavengers. But what else was wrong with the original game?

Well, *Scavenger/Novastorm's* basic storyline isn't bad. It's what you might get from a 'Create Your Own Space Combat Game Plot' kit free with every pack of Crispy-Wheeto-Flaky-Pops. "The year is 2129, and the Bator System is dying... The once mighty Federation teeters on the brink, its cities in ruins, its population decimated. Ironically, the civilisation has been laid low by its own ingenuity – the integrated military artificial intelligence, SCARAB X. Conceived as a state-of-the-art computer network spanning the entire solar system, SCARAB has mutated and taken on a life of its own. No one knows what it wants, but one thing is certain – it's hostile! In a last ditch attempt to save themselves, the rulers of the Federation order the launch of the experimental space fighter *Scavenger IV*. Its mission – to track down and destroy SCARAB X..."

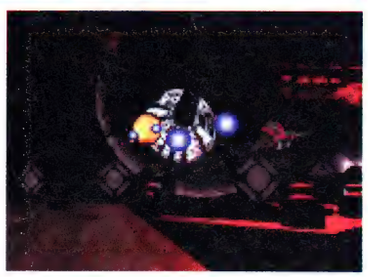
Your pilot's-eye view shows your ship (far right of the picture) and the area in front of you. It also shows your weapons, shield and lives.

It's a cosily familiar scenario. Ironically, the techno-loving games industry revels in stories of the evils of technology gone power-mad. And in the greatest gaming tradition of all, the main mechanical monster has a name which doesn't stand for anything in particular, but sounds really nasty in a vicious mutant sort of way. But all that's not really important. What is important, and what everyone is looking for, is gameplay.

Parallels have been drawn between *Novastorm/Scavenger* and Psygnosis' previous 3-D, flying shoot'em-up, *Microcosm*, which many critics thought had about as much gameplay as Ker-Plunk! without the marble. The comparison is unwelcome. "The code in *Novastorm* is totally original, none of it has been taken from *Microcosm*," Oliver Wright, Head Programmer, informed me. Mild-mannered Game Director, Paul Hilton's eyes turn from baby to steely-blue at the mention of *Microcosm*. "It's not even true that

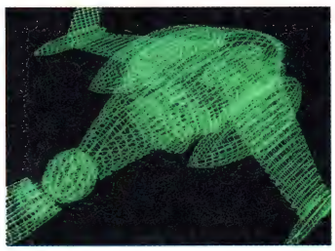


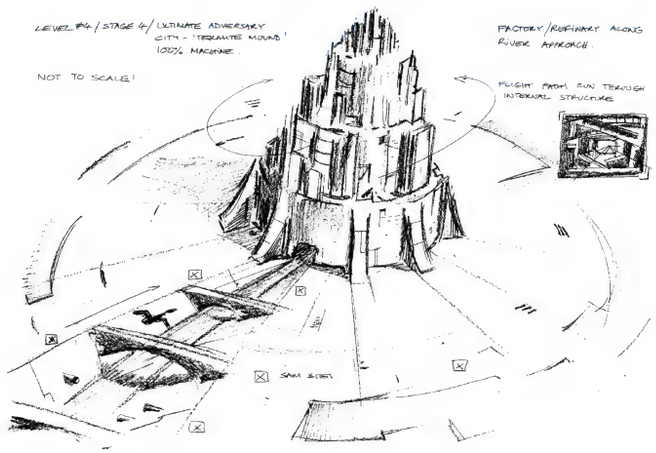
These shots show the variety of landscapes and end-of-level baddies that you will encounter in Psygnosis' Novastorm. There are four levels, each with four stages, with a guardian at the end of each, plus the final stage in which you confront the evil AI, SCARAB X.



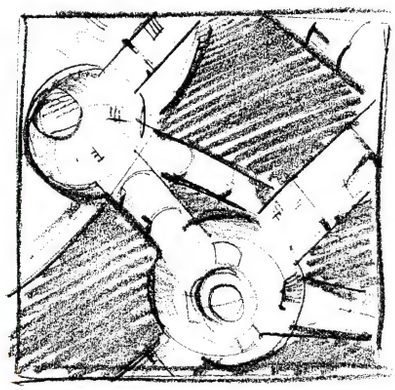
Above: The final stage, the City level, where you meet your Nemesis, SCARAB X. To kill him you have to destroy his body AND his head.

Below, right: This wire frame model shows the intricate geometry involved in creating the Scavenger IV space fighter craft.




LEVEL #4 / STAGE 4 / ULTIMATE ADVERSARY
CITY - 'TERMITE MOUND'
100% MACHINE.
NOT TO SCALE!
FACTORY / REFINERY ALONG RIVER APPROACH.
FLIGHT PATH RUN THROUGH INTERNAL STRUCTURE

Above: One of the sketches from Novastorm's development storyboard.



"The game is one great, big, bursting bag of visual delights, with shimmering skyscapes and tactile textures."

we're trying to improve upon *Microcosm*. We see *Novastorm* as a totally separate game, I don't know why people should keep comparing them."

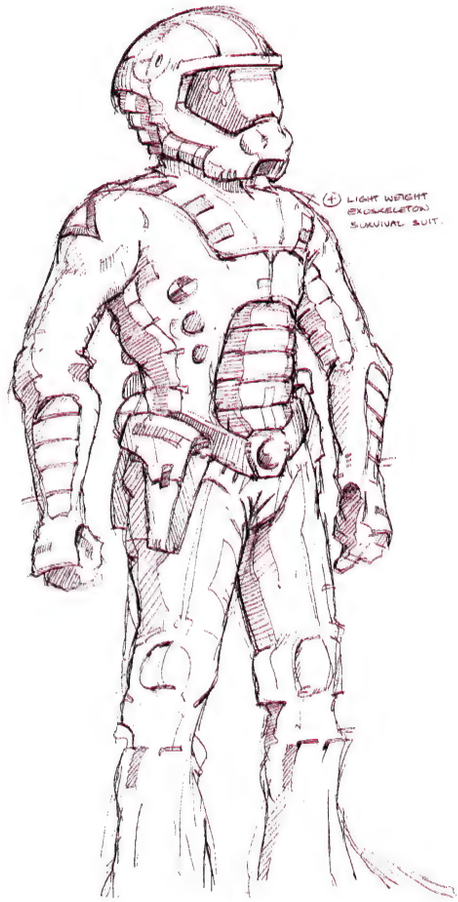
Well, it could be because *Microcosm* was a beautifully rendered shoot'em-up which was, unfortunately a little lacking in gameplay, and *Novastorm* is a beautifully-rendered shoot'em-up which is...?

"The FM Towns version of *Scavenger/Novastorm* may have been disappointing on the gameplay front, but what do you think we've been doing to the game all this time? It hasn't been a straightforward conversion. We've really concentrated on enhancing the gameplay. There are loads more power-ups, including loads more weapons, and you don't lose any weapons when you pick others up. You've got homing lasers and missiles, laser bolts, shock waves and foreground bombs. The enemy have a greater arsenal, too, with special rays which surround your craft in a disabling shield. The game's not going to be easy to get through, but there's still a really good learning curve to it."

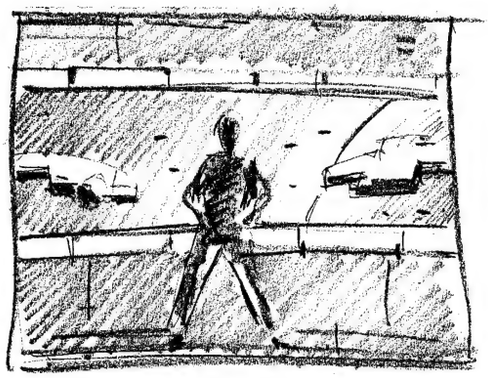
There are four worlds, each with four stages (Volcano, Desert, Ice, Asteroid) with end-of-level guardians to beat, as well as the final Spaceship/City which contains SCARAB X. These levels get progressively harder to complete, but you also get increased firepower as you progress, and hopefully your skills are honed as you play.

Your aims are twofold: to destroy the defences put up by SCARAB X throughout the Bodor Solar System, and to ensure your ship is as highly equipped as possible by picking up power-ups and using weapons and shields effectively.

Top programmers ("my genii", as Paul named them) Oliver Wright and John McMurray have been dedicatedly tweaking (that magical and mysterious practice of programmers) the game to get the gameplay as close to perfection as possible. The difficulty level has been tweaked till its eyes watered, to ensure players aren't frustrated or bored when they first take off.



The full motion video sequences and cut scenes, are also new,



improved and whiter than white. They've been speeded up from the Towns version and are now more action-oriented. After each successful mission, beautiful video sequences show ever increasing forces joining your quest, as you gradually free the worlds from SCARAB X's evil, tyrannical grasp. And the code genii's talents ensure that everything is accessed with silky smoothness, even from a single speed CD-drive. You can skip them too, not that you'd want to miss such visual delights, of course.

In fact, the game is one great, big, bursting bag of visual delights. The landscapes and guardians are beautifully rendered with shimmering skyscapes and tactile textures which have all been separately animated in hours of painstaking slaving over a hot Onyx, or Silicon Graphics workstation. Jerry Oldreive, Graphic Artist, showed me some of the steps involved in creating the complex, end-of-level guardians. Because the models have to stand up to the demands of gameplay, rather than being simple animations, everything has to be animated and looked at, then reanimated, chopping and changing bits and looking at how it all fits together in real time, rather than simply creating a wire frame which is then just stuck into the game. One guardian releases mines which are separate models. This had to be almost completely rendered by hand in order for the separate models to be kept in line.

The end-of-level guardians make up the backbone of this game. The rest of the 'flying along and shooting at things' sections can hold their own against others of the genre, but may not be outstanding. *Novastorm* really shines in the creation of level-topping, teeth-skinning combat with beautifully evil and complex guardians. My favourite was the Beetle. This bionic insect, with wings that are truly shields of steel (eat your heart out, Batfink) is pursued to its nest of deadly waving tentacles. You will need to call on the whole of your resources to avoid a grisly death at the jaws of this creepy crawly fiend. The death sequence here, like the others in the game, consists of an almost orchestral crescendo of explosions. *Novastorm* is big on big bangs. Every level offers a pyromaniac's fantasy of billowing fire and teeth-loosening shock-waves. Even if you escape death, it will be by a nanosecond, as the splinters of your defeated enemy scream past your desperately fleeing craft.

The common divisions between the camps of graphics, gameplay and sound are dissolved in this product. Everything is geared towards the needs of creating an eminently playable game. Soundtrack and sound effects are, for once, brought to the fore of the developer's thoughts. G-force-inducing music and ear-catching effects are all perfectly integrated into the gameplay and have been created by relative newcomer to the games industry, Rik Ede.

Rik's rant

Sound Engineer/Technician/Top Musician/Whatever, Rik has been whisked away from the heady, star-struck atmosphere of the music industry, to work in what has been tediously called the next Rock 'n' Roll – the games industry. He had been promised a gentle, easy acclimatisation period, getting into the groove of the games world, while his prerequisite, state-of-the-art studio was built. This wasn't to be. As soon as Rik glimpsed the ass-blowing speed of *Novastorm*, his muso muse kicked into gear and he started working on music to match the gameplay. Unfortunately, this meant Rik had to work on his bombastic jazz sound, before his studio had even been started, in a room rather inadequately sound-proofed (a couple of eggboxes stuck to the door). This may have provided the Psygnosis groovers with some great beat to work to, but did not impress the rather less groovy bankers in the adjoining NatWest offices. Rik, who considers himself to be a sound technician rather than a musician (he failed music at school) just smiles grimly and wonders what sort of industry he has fallen into where many months and much money can be spent on a product, but where soundtracks are often just added a week before release, and are treated as an afterthought. He's understandably pretty cynical about the state of music in the games industry at the moment.

"I'm pretty new to the industry, and I'm amazed at what's happening in games in relation to the music side. Loads of developers are coming out with these amazing 64-bit games, which are state-of-the-art in terms of graphics, but they're still using their 8-bit musicians. Even companies who have amazing sound facilities just don't use them enough. I'm not saying every game has to have music that's really memorable. It's like film soundtracks – if they do their job, you shouldn't really notice them, they should add to the whole experience, you should notice when they're NOT there. Too many games have soundtracks which add to the gameplay when they're *not* there, because they're so awful."

Rik joined Psygnosis because of "the great vibe that exists in the office. It's a real team." This reflects in their products. The *Novastorm* team seem totally together in their aims and attitudes, and these genuine guys seem genuinely pleased with what they've achieved.

"I'm not really a flying shoot'em-up game fan, at least, it's not my very favourite thing" admits Paul, "but I really enjoy playing this. I mean when you've been working on something for so long and you still love playing it, it must be good."

● KIRSTEN FOSTER

"The death sequences consist of an orchestral crescendo of explosions. *Novastorm* is big on big bangs."

The guardians

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MONITOR FEATURE

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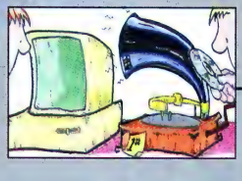
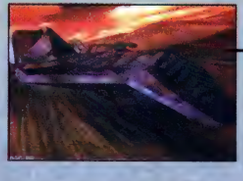
CALLERS WELCOME

FEATURE INDEX

The autumn ECTS at Islington's Business Design Centre, has a lot to answer for. Sonic the Hedgehog spilt Kirsty's drink, the Paragon team clashed horribly with the decor of the Holiday Inn and most of its fellow guests, and the PC Power team got all excited at the prospect of playing some mind-blowing games. This month, as well as a round-up report from the show itself, we showcase two stars – EA's *Little Big Adventure* and Psygnosis' *Ecstatica*.





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***ECTS REPORT*.....P38**
The PC was again the dominant format at this year's Autumn ECTS. The blazing stars of the show pointed the way to the future along the path of the Pentium.

***LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE*.....P45**
The creators of *Alone in the Dark* forget everything they've learnt and come up with a stunningly original twist to the adventure genre. A real show-stopper.

***ECSTATICA*.....P48**
Another *Alone in the Dark* descendant, and another frighteningly original twist to the graphic adventure, with ellipsoid-creatures beating the crap out of each other.

***CD-ROM BUYERS' GUIDE*.....P54**
Tony Kaye tests six CD-ROM drives to find the best value drive around, so you don't have to. Isn't he good? Say thank you. Now write your letter to Santa.

***NOVALOGIC*.....P58**
Paul Mallinson thrashes the developers at their own game. The game is Armoured Fist. The developers are NovaLogic, Volume Pixel pioneers.

***MARK HAMILL INTERVIEW*.....P62**
Dino Boni and Paul Mallinson go all glassy-eyed and girly at the prospect of meeting their hero. They still manage to get some questions out, though.

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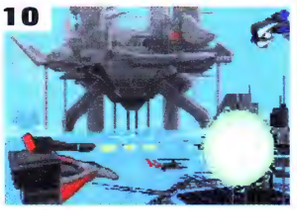
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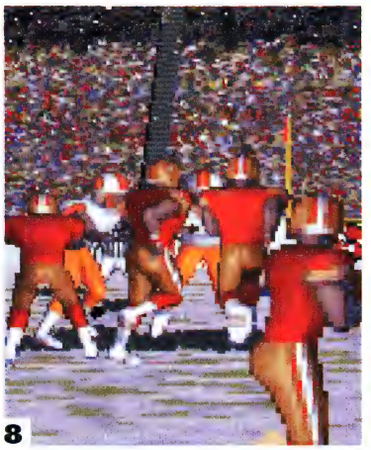
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1. & 12. Cyberwar (action arcade) from Sales Curve Interactive, out October. See preview – issue 9.
2. & 9. The Journeyman Project Turbo (space adventure) from US Gold, out October.
3. & 11. Ticonderoga (strategy war sim) from Mindscape /The Software Toolworks, out November.
4. Dominus (fantasy) from US Gold, out October.
5. Hell (adult adventure) from Gametek, out November.
6. Chaos Control (shoot'em-up) from Infogrames, out November. See preview – issue 10.
7. Iron Cross (military strategy sim) from US Gold, out November.
8. Ultimate Football (American Football) from MicroProse, out now.
10. Zephyr (shoot'em-up) from US Gold, out November.

Feature: Show Report

Curtain Call

As the curtains went back at this year's European Computer Trade Show, it was the PC that once again took centre stage. Dave Westley reports on the noise, the crowds and the seemingly endless number of products *nearly* ready for review.

The Business Design Centre, Islington, London once again offered a home to the raggle-taggle collection of scruffy journalists, hip PR beasts and wide-eyed onlookers that is the computer industry. This year its very walls began to give way as tents, side shows, restaurants and even one brewery (hic) were taken over in the name of the European Computer Trade Show. PC Power were there, of course, sending out spies into the wide, multi-coloured yonder of Ocean, Psygnosis, EA, MicroProse, Virgin and the countless other companies displaying their increasingly sophisticated wares.

And what did we see? Another year, another ECTS and another great show for the PC – there was no other format to challenge its hegemony. The 16-bit Sega and Nintendo just looked tired while Sony's PlayStation kept its games well hidden from the scrutiny of the assembled world press. You could marvel at its shiny grey box, though. The biggest threat to the 486 came not from Sony, Nintendo, Atari or Sega et al, but from Intel themselves. Yep, the Pentium was very much in evidence. With it, EA transmogrified the 486 into a 286 equivalent with their SVGA *Magic Carpet*. Believe me, once you've seen it running you'll never look at your PC in quite the same way again. You might even find yourself calling it 'a pile of old poop'.

Electronic Arts were far from alone in their demand that the gamesplayer upgrade, and upgrade today. Everywhere, there was talk of Pentium 'enhancements'. All new games will run with a 486, yet the increased power of a Pentium will allow for increased frame rates (*Iron Angel*), increased 'brain-power' (*Chessmaster*) and all-round increased increasedness. Walking into some stands was akin to being regressed to a six year old who's been thrust into Hamleys; finding yourself surrounded by delectables that you couldn't afford with a life-time's pocket money. To upgrade your hardware to cope with the luscious *Magic Carpet* (full screen, SVGA, with reflections on), for example, it will set you back an almighty £2,000.

Fortunately there were enough goodies at the show that will work well enough on 386s and/or 486s. Every year the ECTS gets that little bit bigger and for the last two or three ECTSs the proportion of space devoted to the PC has also grown – in both size and stature. The Personal Computer might not be the most obvious gamesplaying machine, with its archaic infrastructure and its confusing backbone of config.sys and autoexec.bat commands but, for the moment, it's the only machine offering enough muscle for development teams to realise their dreams. Of the new wonder machines only Sega's 32X was on show, and its version of *Doom* was just plain awful.

Inside the bustling Business Design Centre in Islington, North London.

Because of the number of products now being developed for the PC, this show report won't be able to visit every single stand/company – we'd have to devote the whole magazine to the cause. Instead we'll touch down at those companies leading the field: Electronic Arts, Virgin and Psygnosis. The other contenders will be covered pictorally, and in the news.

Holy Mother Of God

Holy Mother Of God, Jesus H. Christ, Bugger Me Backwards, thrice. Electronic Arts may have cheated, moving up to the Pentium whilst most others were still getting used to the 486, but the effect of their move has been nothing short of astounding. Of the ten big games of the show, Electronic Arts had three stunners: *Little Big Adventure*, *Magic Carpet* and *Wing Commander 3*, starring Mark Hamill.

Wing Commander 3 has already been covered in detail so I'm not going to waste what little space I have saying anything more about the game – except that its introduction left us speechless – it's easily as good as anything in the 'mother of all things science fiction', Star Wars. PC Power even managed to grab an interview with its principal actor (Mark Hamill AKA Luke Skywalker!). So if you want to know what it's like being a virtual actor (a VActor), or just god, turn to page 62 now.

Not interested? Well Delphine's *Little Big Adventure* (page 45) will get you. It's a shade more subtle and understated than the block-blustering *Wing Commander 3*, but it's shaping up to be an absolutely beautiful game. Designed by Frederic Raynal, responsible for Infogrames' *Alone In The Dark*, it looks like a cross between that game and *Syndicate*. The *AITD* influence comes from the polygonal characters – only they're 1/4 the size (hence the 'Little' in the title). The *Syndicate* influence comes in the game's isometric perspective, its all-round spook-some feel and the vastness of its multiple landscapes (hence the 'Big'!).

The game is set in the dim and distant future and its storyline is yet another cross, this time between Orwell's 1984 and Pratchett's Discworld. Three races live on future-earth: the Grobos (a sort of elephant); the Rabibunnies (cousins of the rabbit) and the Quetches (humans, well, nearly). You are a Quetch, your name is Twinsen and you've been locked in a fortress on Citadel Island for daring to speak of the 'Legend of Sendell'. Worse, your sweetheart has been nabbed by the heinous Dr 'Funfrock', (you can't say that seriously, can you?) a tyrannical despot ruling with the weapon of fear. Somehow you've got to work your way out of the prison, and save your girlfriend from a fate worse than death...

For all the fancy twirls and twists of the various plots, it is the graphics, and the size of

"The biggest threat to the PC came not from Atari, Sega, Sony or Nintendo but from the mighty Intel themselves. Yep, the Pentium was very much in evidence..."

"For all the fancy twists of the plot, it's the graphics that impress most. *LBA* boasts 3-D ray-traced, isometric graphics in SVGA and characters with Gouraud-shading."

the game, that impress the most. *Little Big Adventure* boasts 3-D, ray-traced, isometric graphics in Super VGA and characters that are animated using Gouraud-shading. There are over 40 different locations, comprising of 50 explorable buildings (including fortresses, secret passages, mountain ranges and even an ocean). Indeed, the only bad thing that can be said about the game is that it won't be ready until November, when it can be purchased at the little, big value price of £44.99.

Magic Carpet

Last, but by no means least, comes Bullfrog's *Magic Carpet*. This was the most impressive thing at the show. Full stop. In SVGA mode the real-time, 3-D, texture-mapped terrain looked astonishingly near real – I searched for a stray pixel but couldn't find a single one. Unfortunately, not even the P60 the game was running on could cope with the demands being placed upon it and only with reflections well and truly off did it come close to running smoothly. The final version will run on a 486DX-30 with 8Mb of RAM, but only in VGA mode, very likely with the detail turned right down and with the screen size cut in half. It's depressing, I know but what can you do, except fork out £2,500 on a P100? Then, quite possibly, the *Magic Carpet* would really fly.

The name of the game is war. (Well, it's not but you know what I mean.) You can compete against the computer or another, networked player (or players) in a battle over mana. Mana is essentially magical energy derived from the land. If you can collect enough of it, you will be able to control nature: cause earthquakes, create volcanoes and fireballs, etc., etc., to hurl at your opponents' castles.

Magic Carpet looks magnificent, and is undoubtedly the most eagerly awaited release in the PC Power office. Let's just hope EA send us a Pentium to play it on, otherwise we could find ourselves severely disappointed. Expect a November release.

As well as *Wing Commander 3*, *Little Big Adventure* and *Magic Carpet*, EA have a host of other products which are nearing completion. They are (in no particular order): *System Shock*, a first-person-perspective shoot'em-up (out October); *Panzer General*, a war sim being developed by SSI (out December); *Renegade*, a space combat sim also developed by SSI (out December); *Cyclones*, a smooth-scrolling action adventure game (out November); *Bioforge*, "following on from *Wing Commander 3* as Origin's second interactive movie game" (out December) and *Wings Of Glory*, a WWI flight sim from Origin (out November). Electronic Arts also have *Noctropolis*, an adult-oriented graphic adventure that will "concentrate on mature issues such as adult relationships and the dark side of human nature."

V for Virgin

With products like these on display, if it hadn't been for Virgin and Psygnosis, Electronic Arts might as well take over the PC gamesplaying market lock, stock and barrel. Fortunately, they do exist and all three came close, but not close enough to challenge EA's gaming crown.

Virgin's PR beasts are very lucky critters indeed. They may have twice as many products as most other companies to 'sell', but then most, if not all, of them are soooooo good that little or no prodding of the usually world-weary journalist is needed. Take *Doom 2*, take *TIE Fighter*, take *11th Hour* – every single one of their games sells itself. And they get to play the games before we do, to boot.

In one sense, at least, their showing this year was rather disappointing, however, mainly because of an absence of big surprises – most of their games had been seen at last spring's ECTS and summer's CES. Even the LucasArts section failed to inspire in any major way. Okay, *Dark Forces* looked nice. Certainly the backdrops have been much improved from those in *Doom* and it's nice to be able to adjust the height of your weapon, and be able to look up and down. What the game lacks at the moment, however, is the manifest tension, blood, and gore of its closest relative. The gun is pretty crappy too.

The lack of major surprises means that most of Virgin's products have been covered in earlier issues: *Creature Shock* (issues 5&8), November release); *Command and Conquer* (issue 10, November release); *Malcolm's Revenge* (issue 10, November release); *11th Hour* (issue 5, October release); *Lost Eden* (issue 7, November release) and *NASCAR Racing* (page 26, November release) can all be read up upon in back issues. There have, however, been one or two titles that have escaped our attention, until now that is.

The loveable, roguish Sensible Software have both *Cannon Fodder 2* (November) and *Sensible Golf* ("this Christmas") waiting in the wings. *Cannon Fodder 2* will use the same engine as the original game but the team plan to introduce a range of new vehicles to run ("over soldiers") and new dangers to inflict upon your little army. *Sensible Golf*, on the other hand, is something completely new – well nearly. It does utilise the distinctive Sensible graphic of an overhead perspective looking down upon teeny weeny sprites. It also guarantees the fun-packed gameplay of other Sensible games: "The team are determined to ensure that *Golf* plays just like the real thing but on a computer, which is why they have spent – ooh, months bunking off to play for real between tweaking the control system and mapping the holes," said a Virgin spokesperson. There will be 72 holes in all, mixed and matched to create 20 absorbing courses.

Virgin also have two Disney-licensed titles coming out in October inspired by two of their recent animated features: *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*. Finally, they will be presenting *Iron Assault*

Merit Software's Fighter Wing, out November, has a state-of-the-art 3-D render engine.

– "the armed conflict sim of tomorrow, today," well, December to be precise. "The player pilots one hundred tons of mechanical, metal monstrosity – a monumental and powerful assault vehicle with the shape and versatility of a humanoid." The 3-D, texture-mapped terrain varies from mountain ranges and Arctic wastelands to storm-swept deserts and built-up city-scapes. The player can play against the computer, or another human via modem. It's looking good.

Psygnosis

Sony's commitment to the multimedia market, without wanting to sound facile, is huge. As well as the acquisition of Psygnosis, they are also the developers of the PlayStation, said to be the 32-bit CD platform of the future by many developers – the Team 17 "it's f******* amazing," line seems to be the standard response from those fortunate enough to see its games up and running. To be released in Japan this Christmas, and in Europe in the last quarter of '95, it seems to be the only machine likely to be able to break the PC's stranglehold on its position as the machine for 'state-of-the-art' games.

Unfortunately, the world press were not given access to its domain, hidden as it was in a darkened backroom at Psygnosis' alternative venue, a brewery (yes, they can organise a piss-up). Out in the main area, all that could be seen was a ten-second showreel and the PlayStation casing, the latter unsurprisingly glass-cased on a pedestal and illuminated by a spotlight. Rumour had it that, despite an ostentatious security guard presence, the shiny box was actually empty. However, unlike previous sightings of the system, this model did have a full set of ports round the back – SVHS, multi-out, but no RGB – and there was, allegedly, a finished unit on the Sales Curve stand, running *Cyberwar*. This was because of its ability to generate 900,000 polygons per second (i.e *Cyberwar's* pre-rendered 3-D graphics) in real-time.

The word from stunned developers is that with PlayStation you can finally play with those Silicon Graphics. Games can look that gorgeous without being reduced to monotonous, uninteractive movies spooled off CD. This made the Psygnosis showreel all the more tantalising. Beginning with a large clockwork soldier walking a 360 degree loop, the demo went on to wander through a *Stonekeep*-style dungeon ending with a stunning, screen-filling dragon spewing out lightning-fast, exquisitely detailed spaceships over a speed-blurred world. Cynics claimed it was all pre-rendered and proved nothing. This is true, but developers from a variety of companies, not just Psygnosis, insist the chipset really can produce such imagery in real-time. Indeed, according to one source, the PlayStation can outrun a Pentium PC by a factor of ten on some functions. The only drawback is the limited memory, less than 3Mb, which means the really complex flight sims will have to be cut down. In any case, with no keyboard, complex flight sims will have to be rewritten and probably made simpler and more arcade-like to deal with the lack of keys. One developer also griped about the PlayStation's imaginative PCMCIA save system. This allows you to save games onto removable memory cards, but the memory is far

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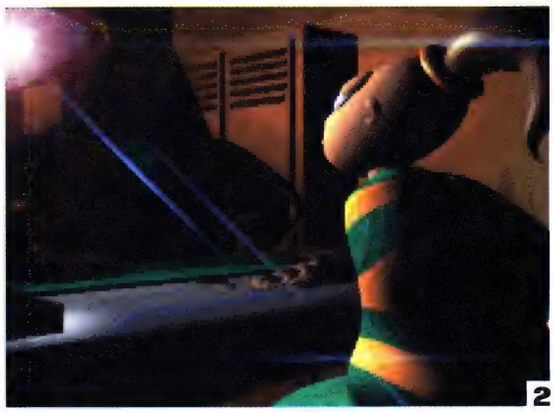
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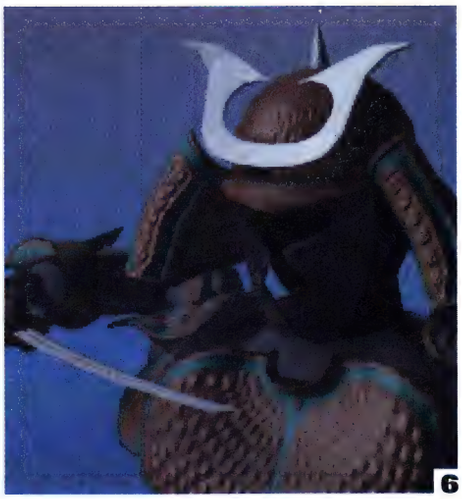
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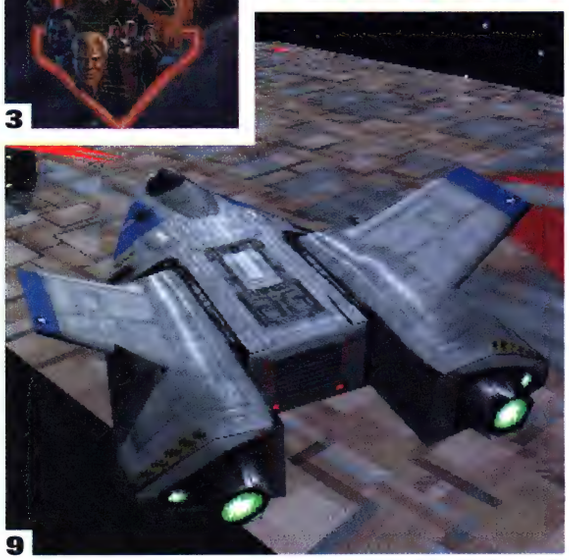
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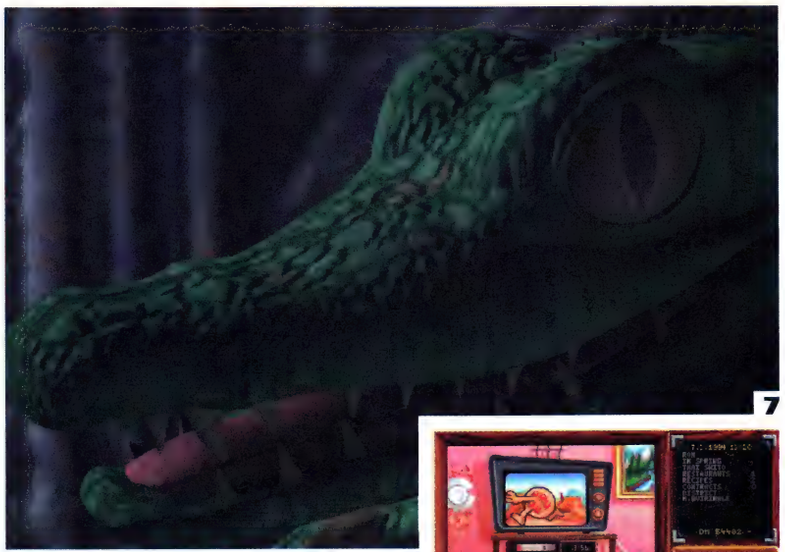
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1. & 2. Little Big Adventure (puzzle, adventure game) from Electronic Arts, out November.
3. Wing Commander 3 (futuristic space flight simulator cum interactive movie) from EA, out November. See Mark Hamill feature (page 62).
4. Quarantine (shoot'em-up on wheels in the style of Doom) from Gametek, out October.
5. Zeppelin (airship sim) from MicroProse, out now.
6. Dr Radiaki (Doom-type beat/shoot'em-up) from Merit Software, out October.
7. Dr Radiaki.
8. Pizza Tycoon (pizza business sim) from MicroProse, out October.
9. Wing Commander 3.
10. CyberJudas (global sim sequel to Shadow President) from Empire, out 'autumn'.
11. Little Big Adventure.

1. Bioforge (bio-mechanical Alone In The Dark) from Electronic Arts, out December.
2. Cybermaxx from VictorMaxx, price £399, out very soon.
3. Magic Carpet (Arabian Knights/Aladdin-style flying carpet shoot'em-up(!)) from Electronic Arts, out December.
4. Little Big Adventure.
5. Little Big Adventure.
6. Powerdrive (overhead perspective Rally race game) from US Gold, out November.
7. Magic Carpet.

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less than on a PC's hard disk.

Nevertheless, the graphics potential of this super-console is such that developers believe PlayStation conversions will have several times more colours and detail than the PC originals. Since the PlayStation will also be far cheaper than a PC, it might appear to be 'Game Over' for PC gaming. Fortunately, most developers don't see it that way. For all the hype, PlayStation won't be on sale for many months yet and in the fickle world of consumer electronics, who knows how it will sell? Most games, even at Psygnosis, still start out on the PC, and with Pentium processors, new graphics cards and all that memory, the PC just keeps getting better. One Psygnosis developer believed the two systems would co-exist very happily, each pushing the other to new heights. For gamers, the unbelievable ferocity of competition provided not just by the PlayStation (Sony), but also 3DO (EA, Panasonic, Sanyo), Saturn (Sega, Hitachi, Microsoft) and CDi2 (Philips) seems set to produce some amazing games.

Back to present reality, however. The star of Psygnosis' show was *Ecstatica*, a massive feature on which can be found on page 48. It really did look stunning, moving so smoothly and with more character than any vintage wine. Alan Maindron really has wiped the floor with Infogrames – *Alone In The Dark 3* looking very poor in comparison. Other games on show included the wonderful *Discworld* (out soon, see Terry Pratchett interview last issue); *Lemmings 3-D* (nice!, out 1995); *Zonked* (a puzzley-arcade game, out "soon"); and, of course, *Novastorm* (see preview, page 32).

The last bit

It could be argued that the growing call for an alternative, larger venue than Islington's Business Design Centre is largely due to (a) the increasing number of PC CD-ROM products on show, combined with the fact that (b) PC boxes are a lot, lot, lot bigger than console ones. I jest, jape and joke, of course, but nevertheless the number of PC products displayed at the show was nothing short of amazing. Everyone from telecommunications giant, GTE, to Amigaphiles, is becoming increasingly involved with its binary delights, and that can only be very good news for us PC owners.

One must ask why so many people are getting involved, though. The PC market may be 'safe' but it's not the largest of markets in the world – especially CD-ROM. This fact can be counter-balanced by the argument that CD-ROM drive owners are more 'active' than any other – let's face it, if you've just spent £200 on a CD-ROM drive you're going to want to put some shiny things in it. Perhaps a more realistic argument, though, is that the PC is the only training ground for those who want to develop on future-machines. There's no point developing for the MegaDrive if you want to be up on your code when machines like the PlayStation arrive.

There is not just an increase in quantity, but also in quality of software – there really are some fantabulous games just around the corner. Unfortunately, the second lesson of the show was that if you want to play them, you'd better start thinking about upgrading. Intel really are serious about attracting the gamesplaying market, planning a multi-million dollar campaign for its Pentium processor to include a co-promotion with EA and their *Magic Carpet*. Hopefully, Pentium prices will go the way of the 486 (steadily down). Then we might get the (affordable) future we deserve! PC POWER

"The star of Psygnosis' show was the ellipsoid, 3-D adventure, *Ecstatica*. It really did look stunning, moving so smoothly and with more character than a vintage wine."

Jason Spiller: A History Lesson

Opinion

My dad always told me I should go into ironmongery. But for the past twelve years, in fact my entire working life, I've been a part of the biz we call games. Once upon a time I was the manager of a little computer game store in a twee shopping mall in the equally twee, walled, cathedral city of Chichester. A pungent niff of freshly ground coffee and spicy pot pourri from adjacent shops always hung in the air, as it seems to in all twee shopping malls. It was Christmas and the shop and the mall were decked to the nines in appropriate Yuletide fashion. A motley scrum of niffy secondary school kids, fresh from PE, crowded around the latest in high technology, which stunned the wretched little urchins into silence. It was a Commodore 64 in all its 16 marvellous colours and incredible sound. The ZX 81 was at once demoted to doorstop duty.

That Christmas, the shop couldn't stock enough C64s to meet demand. Thousands upon thousands of pounds changed hands, the till was stuffed with cash and cheques and we had an exercise book half full of orders. I dressed as a pink elephant, a corpulent colleague squeezed into a moth-eaten lion costume and we braved the night's chill and potential humiliation, during one late night shopping evening before Christmas day, as we trooped around carrying a hastily constructed sign emblazoned with the motto "COMMODORE 64s NOW IN STOCK!". We shifted the whole lot that night. Computer games had become an industry and I was there at the coming-of-age party. From then on, accelerating technology and consumer needs would make planning almost impossible for hardware manufacturers. The reason the Commodore 64 was such a success was, of course, its immeasurably superior visual and sonic capabilities. But spotting the winning machines of the future would become less and less straightforward.

Why dredge up this ancient, eye-misting recollection? Well, history has a strange habit of repeating itself and much can be learned from the ebb and flow of the games market. The Japanese giants Sega and Nintendo are synonymous with the games cartridge. But who can forget the last cart boom and the debacle of Atari. From 1978 to the early eighties, Atari monopolised a boom market with its cart-based C600, or VCS as it came to be known. With its fake walnut veneer facia it graced the living rooms and bedrooms of 25 million households. But greed and a complete lack of forward planning led to a crash that sent shock waves throughout the financial world. The bigger they come... What happened to Atari could happen to any giant corporation that thinks that it is bigger than the industry it's involved in. Atari kept its cart games production unrealistically high and churned out VCSs at the same rate, when the consumer demanded something new. People were scared. Computers were taking over the working environment like a callous, usurping, intellectual alien. The consumer was suffering a panic attack. Their off-spring must learn about computers in order to fit into the future. So the advent of the keyboard machine was ensured, and these machines became the new games machines.

The advent of 16bit machines introduced two major contenders, the Atari ST and the Amiga. Commodore displayed amazing perspicacity once more by packaging their machine with stereo and attractive graphics, and the burgeoning software design fraternity was only too pleased to exploit its potential. Atari's machine was a Plain Jane in comparison. With an inadequate Motorola sound chip and boring vector graphics, the ST was relegated to the B-team where it remained for the next seven years.

Then came an epoch in the evolution of computer entertainment. At a time when, in theory, technology could have forced the market through the roof, the industry was in a state of confusion and the smell of fear filled its nostrils. Commodore's and Phillips' joint brainwave was to utilise the most identifiable format, CD, and introduce it to the whole family unit. They tried to drag the computer game culture, kicking and screaming, out of the dark, smelly bedroom and into the bright, clean, Shake 'n' Vac'd environment of the living room. They even designed their machines to look like VCRs, which had long been accepted in the family congregational dwelling. But it was about as appropriate as removing a tyre from a gibbon's cage and replacing it with an antique, porcelain jardiniere. Games had been marketed as youth culture and nothing but nothing would force dads and sons, mothers and daughters together. Commodore initiated a re-design in the shape of the CD32, fashioned in the style of cart-based console machines, just as the console drifted out of vogue. Trends and technology mutate at speed as the industry sits and gapes. By the time a target is identified and a machine is designed and manufactured, technology has raced on and the consumer's needs have changed.

In this state of confusion, the PC has become a rock to cling to. It has been the only machine to bank on in terms of entertainment software. It is established, has a massive user base and CD-ROM is a logical and attractive development which was immediately marketable. As for Sega, Nintendo, Commodore and the like, they would do well to remember that there is much to be learned from history.

"They tried to drag the computer game culture, kicking and screaming, out of the dark, smelly bedroom and into the bright, clean, Shake 'n' Vac'd living room."

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The future of 3-D adventure games can be found on this, and the next eight pages, in our exclusive look at *Little Big Adventure* from Electronic Arts and *Ecstatica* from Psygnosis. Both represent, in very different ways, an improvement of revolutionary scale from the iconoclastic, but increasingly dated *Alone In The Dark* games.

Little

Above: Fighting off the guards is made easier when you change into a warden's outfit.

Above: For its cinematic links, LBA zooms into the screen, changing from SVGA to VGA in the process.

Adeline Software's Little Big Adventure looks set to set the 3-D adventure world ablaze. Dino Boni tells you why.

France is home to many things, (cheeses, wine, middle-class bores in Provencal chateaux) but none are as quietly amazing as Adeline software. Residing in the beautiful town of Lyon, Adeline have been very quiet – until a few weeks ago. At the ECTS in Islington, they unveiled a new game that is set to produce tremors that will rival even LA's Big One. *Little Big Adventure* is a new breed, descended from the *Alone in the Dark* games, and the resemblance is quite understandable, as the majority of the staff at Adeline worked on the original *Alone* game for Infogrames.

LBA is a large step forward from *Alone*, but much of the earlier game's influence has rubbed off on *LBA*. Was this the intention of Adeline, or did it just happen that way? "Well, most of the people who worked on *LBA* worked on *AITD*," said Serge Plagnol, programmer on the project. "We are still the same people, so much of *LBA* takes cues from *AITD*. *LBA* is a new project, because everything had to be re-written from scratch, because when we left Infogrames, we couldn't take any code with us. Actually, this was good because we had a nice clean start. We could go straight into 32-bit programming which wasn't possible before."

The game also has a very heavy French influence, but this is considered a good thing at Adeline "I think it has a lot to do with culture," mused Serge. "Your country's culture reflects in the games you produce. *LBA* is a French game, so there is a lot of French influence in there. It's good, becuase you find that you have many different ways of doing the same game, depending on what country you're in!"

LBA, as you can see from the screenshots on these pages, is bit different, graphically, from *Alone*. The confusing camera angles have been replaced by the tried-and-tested system of isometric 3-D, and this was one thing that the company decided to do right from the start. "The four original people who left Infogrames kind of sat together and talked about what they wanted to see in the game. There was a lot of brainstorming, particularly because it took a while for all the computer equipment to arrive, so they had a lot of time on their hands for design

Big Adventure

and to sit around the table and talk about what the game was going to be like." It wasn't the effort of one person, though. Everyone who was involved with the game suggested ideas. There were one or two people who suggested more ideas than most, but Adeline don't want to credit just one person with the design of *LBA*, as Serge confirmed. "I can't really say that it was the effort of just one person; everyone here put something into *LBA*. A lot of input came from Frederick Raynard, and Didier Chamfray (*LBA's* animator) threw a lot of ideas in as well."

Hand-made in Lyon

The animation of the main characters is nothing short of spectacular; they all move with such fluid animation that it's hard to imagine that they are made up of over 250 polygons. All the characters were drawn by hand before being drawn on the computer; something that helps encourage the idea that computer animation is an artform in its own right. Serge recalls the long process of designing, sketching and drawing the characters. "There were a lot of roughs done by hand on paper; we have a lot of those still hanging around the office," he said. "Didier did all of the animation in the game. Everything you see in *LBA*, including the animated intros, was done by him. He is really influenced by cartoons and traditional animation, which is why the characters look as they do. It's good though, becuase now *LBA* has a unique look that no other game has." Each of the main characters had to go through this process, but this isn't the reason *LBA* has taken so long to write. "It's been going since Adeline started, which I think is about 18 months. A lot of that time was taken up re-writing all of the libraries we use, such as the 3-D engine. These will be used in other products as well."

As the code for *LBA* was written from scratch, the decision to re-write everything was made at an early stage. The basis of any polygon game is the mathematics that made all of this 3-D possible, and this was mostly done by Serge himself, with some help from Frederick Raynard. "We improved the 3-D engine a lot; it's much faster than it was for *Alone*," he says, with more than a little trace of pride. "I have a mathematical background, so I re-designed the 3-D engine on paper, but I never actually programmed it. A lot of design went into the game, and it's difficult to make the finished product look and act like the vision you have of it in your own mind." Many of the problems encountered with the coding came when they decided to add Gouraud-shading and lighting to all of the polygon objects in the game. This takes away the 'flat' look that is associated with traditional polygon games, but it caused quite a few headaches. "The lighting and shading were very difficult as well, but they were included so the objects and characters in the game don't look as flat as the ones in *Alone*," he said. You could hear his teeth grind as he remembered the process.

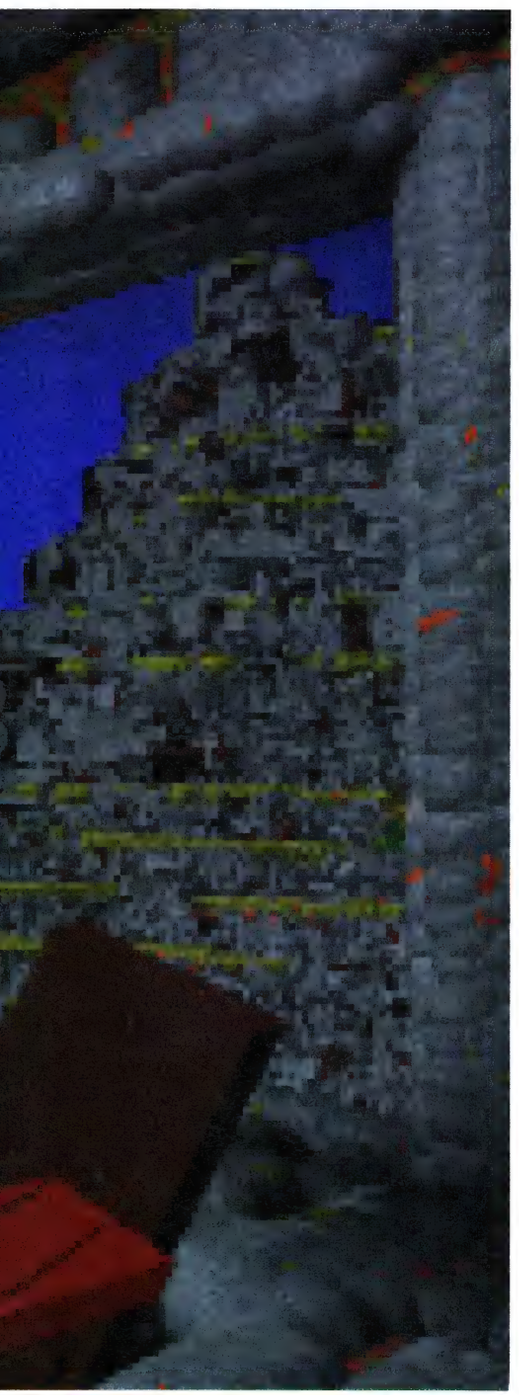
Most of the game is written in Assembly, but the gameplay engine and scenario controller is written in C. This is becoming a common blend in commercial games, where the assembly code is used for the speed-crucial parts of the game. One of the aspects of the game that requires a lot of speed is the close-up view. This zooms in on your character and his immediate surroundings, effectively zooming in on the playing area to magnify it by about 10 times. This is selectable from the keyboard, but the real intention of the zoom was to be able to produce 'links' inbetween the sections of the game. There are some 3D Studio-rendered animations present in the finished version, but many of the staff at Adeline prefer the zoom mode. "We wanted to be able to create interlinks between the stages in the game, and this seemed a good way to do it. The scenario runs much more smoothly with the close-up sections, and it's nice to see a little bit of detail every now and again. It's really the same thing you would use in a normal movie; when you want to emphasise something, you use a close-up shot of it."

The last thing to be added to the finished version of *Little Big Adventure* is the speech. Being a CD game, there is ample room for this, now essential, add-on, but it couldn't be included on the demo for space reasons. "We had some trouble with it at the ECTS show, and that was why the game was running in the text-only mode. We are putting the English voice in today, which is a very exciting time for us," he says. In the background, wisps of dialogue can be heard, but sadly it is all in French. Will there be more than one spoken version then? "We are producing a spoken version in English, German and French plus text versions in Italian and Spanish as well. There were a few technical problems with the speech system, but everything is sorted out now!"

And sorted out it most definitely is. With its superb animation, gameplay and superior coding, *LBA* is set to convert even gamers who hated *Alone* to this kind of game. In case you can't wait to see the final version, we have included a demo of the game on our CD. (Thanks to Serge at Adeline for this!) As you toy with the demo, imagine playing the full version, with over 250 locations, full digitised speech and even more interaction. If you don't slide off your seat, wet with anticipation, then there's something very wrong with you indeed. Personally, I slid off my seat a month ago and haven't been able to sit back down since. PC POWER

LBA uses an isometric perspective to give the gamer a feeling of space, and to allow him/her early warning of a guard's entrance onto the screen. Above: Watch out for the elephants. Some of them shoot things at you from their long trunks. They are also incredibly strong and very difficult to defeat in a battle. Right: You can talk to a lot of creatures by switching to Normal mode and pressing the space bar.

Feature: Ecstatica



Ecstasy

***Ecstatica*, Psygnosis' ellipsoidical (?) graphic adventure, is a stunner – literally. Its unique look, combining cutesy characters and ruthless violence is the work of a 2-man, non-gameplaying team. Dave Westley met the mavericks.**

"I just sprinkled a little bit of blood on a body, just playing around, and people liked it. So I added bit more blood – and people liked that even more. So I kept on going, sprinkling more and more until we ended up with an '18' rating. Life's funny like that." – Alain Maindron, animator and designer of the funny and ferocious, *Ecstatica*.

Take a look at the characters on this page, take a look at the assortment of piglets, werewolves and hob-goblins on the next four. Aren't they the cutest things that you've ever seen. Now look a little bit closer at the pictures. Notice anything disturbing? You should do. There are priests hanging upside down on crosses, young maidens with spikes through their chests and blood and guts aplenty. It isn't nice, is it?

But then it isn't supposed to be. Welcome to the first cutely-animated, '18'-rated fairy-tale-cum-graphic-adventure with interactive movie pretensions. It's the creation of Andrew Spencer (chief (actually, sole) programmer) and Alain Maindron (artist, animator and designer) and has been in development for over five years now. Obvious comparisons will immediately be drawn between it and *Alone In The Dark* – the multiple camera angles and polygonal (ellipsoid, in fact) creatures making them two very similar entities indeed. Yet while *Alone In The Dark's* creators have gone on to make the very gamey *Little Big Adventure*, this two-some have taken the atmospheric/movie pretensions of *Alone In The Dark* one step further, creating the closest thing to a game-film this industry has ever seen – stealing *AITD's* crown in the process.

For all of the technical innovations of *Alone In The Dark*, it was the very distinctive atmosphere of the game that made it such a success. The inherent tension of moving a character around a haunted house was brought to near Hitchcock-ian, Psycho-esque proportions with the game's multiple and deeply disturbing camera angles. For the first time in the history of gaming the holy grail of the interactive movie started to look like a distinct possibility.

"That's why I'm so shocked at what they (the creators of *Little Big Adventure*) have done," says Andrew. "To cope with the SVGA they've had to make the characters really small and give the game an isometric perspective. Doing that takes away any chance of the immediacy and intimacy of the *Alone In The Dark* game – however hard you tried you couldn't make something like *Syndicate* or *Cannon Fodder* into something resembling a film – the scale's all wrong. What they've created as a result is very much a game, whereas what we've done, maintaining and enhancing the *AITD* perspective, is to create very much an experience.

Is it more of an experience than *Alone In The Dark*, though? The answer is, quite definitely, yes – and for a host of reasons. The most important of these, though, has been the naiveté of Alain. "I'd never played a computer game before I started working on *Ecstatica* and so didn't come to the project with any in-built preconceptions about what a game should be like. I just took my experiences as an animator at Disney and brought them to work here. It's been brilliant. There's just so much more scope for creativity – you've got to remember that working on a project for a large film company means basically following, exactly, what the director wants – there's no room to exercise your own imagination. That can be really soul destroying."

Andrew admits that Alain's surpassed himself, producing something far better than he could

"I just sprinkled a bit of blood around, and people liked it. So I kept on going, and we ended up with an '18' rating. Life's funny like that."

have done. "I'd like to think of the three years that I have spent working on the game engine, before we started work, as indirect creativity – that when I wrote the game engine I did it expecting to use it afterwards to produce a game of my own. Of course, programming itself is creative. It doesn't just happen – 'Clic, Clak, Magic!' as Alain would say – but I did have ambitions to produce something creative in the more traditional sense of the word. But it didn't happen – nothing original came out – at least nothing on a par with what Alain has come out with anyway.

Alain's story, in brief, goes something like this: the hero of the game arrives in a small secluded village where weird and unexpected things are happening. He, or she, discovers that a woman in the village used to use magic, but lost control – so much so that her dreams took on a life of their own, jumping out of her id and out into the physical world around her. The hero has to follow her 'path', learn her magic, and so be able to fight the monsters and return them from whence they came.

"*Ecstatica* is strong on fantasy," says Alain, "too much so perhaps. When we first started the game we knew that we had so many obstacles in our way that the specific storyline took a back seat to more pressing concerns. I wanted to make it more realistic – it's obviously set in medieval times so I wanted to do research and get everything looking and feeling as close to that as possible. In the end everything just evolved. The next time we can set the game in the present and make everything a lot more realistic. I'm looking forward to that."

In one section you can put on a shield of armour which will protect you from the nasty creatures that abound. Warning: armour slows you down to a sluggish pace so make sure you need to use it.

"The hero arrives in a secluded village, where a girl's dreams have taken on a life of their own, jumping out of her id, into the physical world around her."

Ellipsoids

The second, major reason why *Ecstatica* does so much better than *AITD* in terms of generating an atmosphere, is the not-so-subtle improvement of the graphics, most notably the replacement of polygons with ellipsoids. "In one sense it seems natural to use ellipsoids rather than polygons," says Andrew. "When you first begin to draw you don't draw polygons, you draw circles – they're much less abstract and they reflect the world around you so much better. The idea was to make the characters in *Ecstatica* more lifelike, more organic and aesthetically pleasing than those in *Alone In The Dark*. It was also quite logical that *Alone In The Dark* used polygons – simply because games have always used them for flight sims, etc. Ellipsoids are also a lot harder to generate!

"As technology improves, and machines become less powerful, it will matter less whether you use polygons or ellipsoids, though. At the moment we're very limited in the number that we can use to make a particular creature – we use around 40-50 for the most complex characters – and they still look very crude compared to real objects. If we could use 100s or even 1000s for each object, then those objects could look, to all intents and purposes, real. When that stage is reached it won't matter one jot whether we use polygons or ellipsoids.

"At the moment, though, the use of ellipsoids does give us a massive advantage over engines using polygons. You only have to look at our characters moving to realise that." And it's true. You'll rub your eyes when you first see your character transformed into a frog to go bouncing through the grass, or watch the werewolf extend its claws to take a swipe at you.

The fact that some scenes are 'staged', i.e. use pre-set animations, does help a little in this

Meeting the creators

PCP: What games do you like?

AM: I like *Civilisation* because it is educative. I like the first *Alone In The Dark* game (not the second).

AS: *Alone In The Dark* and *Doom*.

PCP: What did you do before you started on *Ecstatica*?

AM: I worked on a French TV series, on American Tails II, a short film, and at Disney in Australia.

AS: I wrote *International Soccer*. I also used to work in a bar.

PCP: How did you two meet?

AM: I met Andrew when I met his ex-wife.

PCP: Wouldn't you prefer to be a pop star than a programmer?

AM: I don't know. I'd prefer to learn acupuncture and Chinese herb medicine. I'd also like to write books but I can't be that good 'cos I can't publish them. (Actually I only ever wrote one).

AS: Better to be a successful computer games developer than an unsuccessful musician.

PCP: Do you consider what you do to be creative?

AM: It's creative because we're discovering what interactivity is (and nobody agrees yet what it is).

AS: Very.

PCP: What are you going to do next?

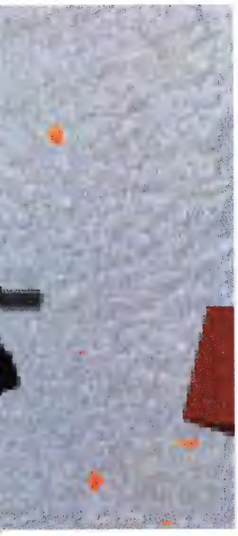
AM: A bigger game with real control of dialogue and probably a bit more sex. We love it all.

AS: More games using the same system while enhancing that system.

PCP: Why don't you have a name?

AS: Well we do, sort of. We can't tell you 'till we find out if anyone else has used it before.

PCP: Thank you.



Left: A woman lies prostrate across a table with a spike through her stomach. Ecstatica is full of scenes such as these, providing a nasty, evil, disturbing backdrop to all of your actions. They're also the reason for the game's '18' rating. Below: An opening shot. You arrive at a village, and enter it to refill your water bottle, only to find yourself attacked by a wide variety of piglets. Immediately below: In the bell tower with a slightly doo-lally priest. There could be something that you want to do up here – and it might make some noise.

Alain Maindron (left) and Andrew Spencer (right) are the mad two-some who have put Ecstatica together. Alain's been responsible for the art and design, Andrew the programming.

Below: This werewolf-esque-type creature just isn't nice. He'll clobber you, drag you down into his basement, hang you up by the legs and beat you about the head. He's also made up of about fifty ellipsoids. Left: a small piglet flies through the air with the greatest of ease, and a big stick. Make sure that you manage to turn in time. Remember also that every time you're hit you're weakened substantially.

respect. However, Andrew is adamant that such scenes are not only few and far between, but that the player won't even know that they're happening. "The bits that work best in *Ecstatica* are those parts that are the least staged. When things are too staged you lose control over your character for too long and it is frustrating. *Ecstatica* is a mixture of the staged and un-staged but with an emphasis on freedom of movement – to an extent that the character will believe that he's in control all of the time."

The result

Take Alain's genius for animation and story-telling, mix with the most advanced 3-D game engine in the world, bring to the boil and simmer for five years and you get one of the most atmospheric, nay haunting, games ever. "Entertainment is all about eliciting an emotional response," says Andrew. "Many early games focused on anger as the easiest emotion to tap into (e.g. shoot'em-ups/beat'em-ups). Fear is another very basic emotion which is perhaps the next easiest to tap into. Eventually games will be able to tap into the whole gamut of human emotions – just as films do now."

"One of the things we'd really like to do is to make people laugh," says Alain, "laughter and fear go so well together. Unfortunately, laughter is one of the hardest things to generate, mainly

Above: In a crypt with only a candle for company. It's not only the ellipsoids that make the graphics in this game something special, it's also the backdrops, all of which are stunningly detailed – so detailed in fact that they look almost like they're made up from SVGA objects.

because no one has managed to get dialogue in a game right. It's no use stopping the game dead to bring up an option screen of possible answers – that completely destroys the flow and shatters any illusion that you're 'there'. The only thing that we can think of is to have three buttons, each one corresponding to a certain type of response – say sarcastic, kind, angry or whatever. That way there'd be no break in the game and everything that's said would be fresh – the player wouldn't have heard it before. I don't think *LBA* has got it right – giving the character a number of modes (sporty, aggressive, cautious and normal) simply distances the player from the game.

It is something that Alain and Andrew will be working on very hard for the next game. "One day games will replace film – well, certain types of film anyway," says Andrew. "I can't see there ever being a game version of The Piano. But the Terminators of this world, sure – they're made for interactivity. The problem is that we haven't got the tools for them worked out yet, and speech is top of the list of 'not worked out'. Maybe we'll be the ones to do that."

Certainly, Andrew and Alain already have expansionist aims. Next week the company plan to take on another two people – bringing the team up to a magnificent four. Andrew is typically philosophical about the future: "I've developed this game engine now, so I suppose I'd better use it!" We're ecstatic! PC POWER

Kirsten Foster: Lucid Dreaming

Opinion

After an ECTS, a computer entertainment journalist's thoughts naturally turn to things futuristic and fantastic. The show presented many possible, some predictable and a few promising paths to the future. Yet gameplay, as ever, is the one vital and often elusive magic ingredient which all developers (and gamers) want/crave. It has been said many times before, and yes, I'll say it again, because I'm practising to be a parrot in a Tizer advert, the best games are those played against human opponents or even with human collaborators/partners, and a game which boasts the ultimate in freedom of movement and gameplay is a life stretch in Wormword Scrubs compared to the freedom of the infinite twists and turns of the human imagination.

"Yes? And?" I hear you query. God, you're an awfully hard lot to please, do you know that? Well if you've got patience, and an enquiring mind, read on and you may be given an exclusive glimpse of the (very distant, admittedly) future. If you are lacking these qualities, what the hell are you reading this for? Just skip to the reviews, look at the pictures, read the conclusions, buy your games and stick this mag in the loo for idle skimming or any other use you can put it to.

Back to the future. The vision of things to come at the moment seems to concentrate on linking human players together in a game environment, which recreates reality as closely as possible, using technology to reproduce the sensory inputs that occur in real worlds. This could be affected through the use of 'VR suits' (as envisaged by Philip Kerr in his futuristic crime novel 'A Philisophical Investigation') which act like a second skin, one which links you to the VR world. Obviously, the reproduction of the millions of infinitely subtle and varied sights, sounds, smells and textures which our senses receive every second is a technological nightmare. But if this future is the stuff of dreams, then maybe the road to achieving it should be travelled actually through our very own dreams.

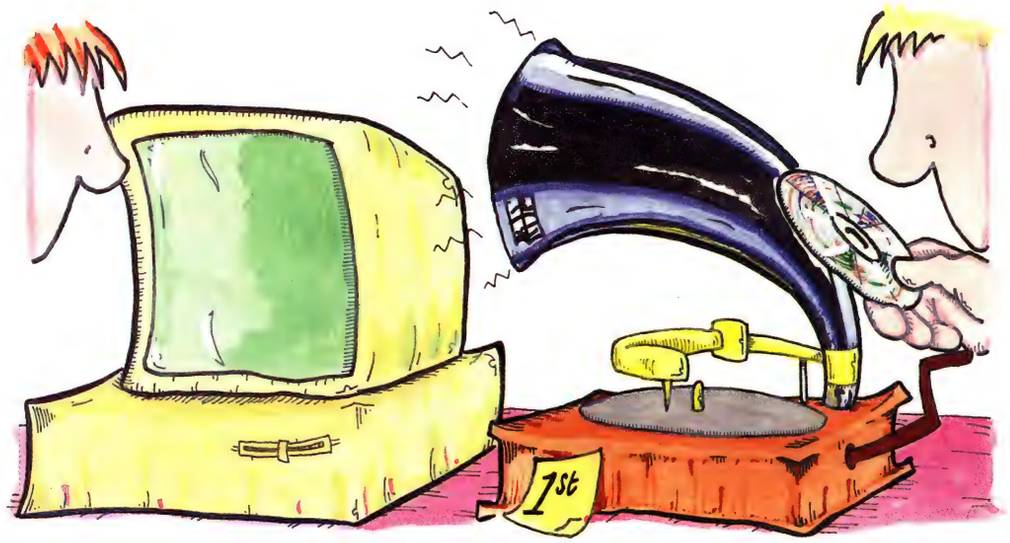
Lucid dreaming is a term first used by Dutch psychiatrist, Frederik van Eeden, earlier this century. It describes the strange state of a dreamer actually being aware that they are dreaming. Stephen LaBerge is a psychophysiologist and world-leader in lucid dreaming promotion and research. LaBerge, with his colleagues and other enthusiasts at the Lucidity Institute in Palo Alto, California, has been researching the possibilities opened up by this mysterious facet of the human mind.

Once a person is aware that they are dreaming, it becomes possible for them to actually control their dreams. By doing so, it is thought that people can improve all sorts of skills. "Ideas in business, politics, ecology, athletics, or indeed any endeavour can be tried in the model world of dreams," suggests LaBerge. Lucid dreamers can practise skills, and experiment with various courses of action in the dream world, treating it as a VR world, with the mind's own dreaming abilities being used as a low-tech VR machine. The Lucidity Institute aims to help people achieve this control over their dreams through the use of the DreamLight. This machine consists of a mask with two infrared sensors which detect signs of REM sleep, then switch on a flashing light to signal to the sleeper that they are dreaming, hopefully without waking them up.

Even if the claims of self-improvement through controlled dreaming are debatable, the entertainment value of being able to control one's own dreams is unmistakeable. LaBerge himself compares lucid dreaming to VR. "The only difference is that lucid dreaming uses the best computer you can get – your own brain." So it seems that the dream of being able to create virtually real worlds in which to live out your fantasies may become a reality, despite, rather than because of technological advances. Yet just because we are playing with what is seen as 'natural' – our imaginations – this doesn't mean we're not playing with fire.

Susan Blackmore, a psychologist at the University of the West of England, is concerned by anecdotal reports which talk of people losing the ability to discriminate between dreams and reality as a result of having too many lucid dreams. And Francis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA's structure, theorised that dreams were the result of the brain shedding excess memories and recalling dreams could therefore lead to mental instability. Yet LaBerge counters this by saying that learning the techniques of lucid dreaming can actually help one distinguish between dreams and reality. "Dreaming is the basic function of the brain in understanding the world. We are always dreaming... that is, we are always constructing simulations out of reality... out of the firing of neurons. That's what we're doing right now, the difference is, the dreams we're having right now are constrained by sensory input." Freed from the restrictions of the physically possible in this world, gamesplayers of the future could link up with other lucid dreamers in games of boundless imagination and excitement. Sound good? The only problem is, when you wake up, you could find out that you're a Dwibley.

"A game boasting the ultimate in freedom and gameplay, is a life stretch in Wormwood Scrubs compared to the freedom of our imaginations."



Six of the Best

We all want a CD-ROM drive for Christmas. Tony Kaye tells you which one to buy. Photography by Keith Maton.

This year's Christmas lists of the rich and optimistic will include a new Ferrari and the footballing ability of Ryan Giggs. The rest of us will have to make do with more realistic luxuries – like a CD drive. Prices are falling and how else are you going to play games like *7th Guest, Rebel Assault* and *Under a Killing Moon*? So, if you expect a CD-ROM drive in your stocking along with the new socks, after shave and copy of the Guinness Book of Records, you have to make sure that you drop the right hints. This is where I come in. I looked at six of the best drives in the realistically affordable bracket, and here are my findings. Firstly, a general look at what you need.

Speed

The basic requirements of a CD-ROM drive are that it must be multi-session. This means that it will read all of the information on the disc, even if it has been written to more than once (such as PhotoCD discs). The drive must also be capable of a sustained rate of transfer of at least 150 Kb/second. This is known as a single speed drive. All of the drives in this feature are double speed or above (theoretically, the faster the transfer rate, the better, but more on that later).

I took a look at six drives that are currently available. These range from my own humble Panasonic, double speed drive that's been installed in my computer for the last year or so, to the more up-market NEC 3Xi triple speed. I will cover how well they perform, what sort of quality they offer and, of course, price. The result is an outline of what to spend your (or someone else's) money on. All of the prices in this feature are average street prices including VAT – in other words, the price you can expect to pay with some shopping around and looking in various magazines. This gives a more realistic view of what you can afford.

Interface

There are several ways to add a CD-ROM drive to your system. The most common ways involve a dedicated interface either on a separate card or as an integral part of a sound card. The other main connection method is using a SCSI interface. This stands for Small Computer Systems Interface and the controller is capable of handling up to eight devices including hard drives, floptical drives, tape backup and more.

New CD ROM drives are appearing now that will work by connecting to your existing IDE hard disk controller. This is fine if you only have one disk drive as IDE can only handle two devices on the system at any one time.

CONCLUSION

If you want to save money, the Mitsumi offers a working double speed drive for the least cash. However, paying slightly more for the Panasonic would be the ideal combination of price and quality. The Panasonic also features in the GameBlaster package, which is ideal as a multimedia starter kit.

If you can afford it, a SCSI controlled drive gives you faster access and the ability to add another six SCSI devices such as tape streamers, floptical drives, hard disks etc. The new Hitachi 6550 offers all of this for a ground-breaking price and must be my recommendation in this area.

I would not recommend investing in a faster drive, yet. They are still expensive and, in normal use, not a lot of speed advantage is gained for the average user. It is only where very disc-intensive applications are used that any benefit can be seen. It is unlikely that software will emerge that requires these speeds for some time, so I would recommend a double speed drive unless you have a lot of money to spare.

With all technology-based investments, you've got to jump on the bandwagon at the right time. There's never been a better time to upgrade to CD-ROM, so here's to a very merry CD Christmas!

PC POWER RECOMMENDED THE COMPLETE PC ENTERTAINMENT PACKAGE

Panasonic CR-562-B

A large number of these drives have been sold, because it offers good quality at a good price. While not the fastest and most accurate drive on the market, it is perfectly adequate for most people's needs.

The drive is double speed and records a data transfer rate of 304Kb/s at 98% accuracy – well within acceptable boundaries – and costs around £140. It is multi-session and PhotoCD compatible – as are all of the drives featured here.

If your existing sound card has a Panasonic interface, connecting the drive is very easy. Simply mount the drive in a spare 5.25" slot, connect a power lead and run the ribbon and audio leads to your sound card. If you have a card without an interface, then you can buy a separate interface card for around £15. The audio lead still needs to be connected to your sound card if you want to play music through it.

MANUFACTURED BY:	**Panasonic**
SPEED:	**Double**
DATA TRANSFER RATE:	**304Kb/s**
ACCURACY:	**98%**
STREET PRICE (INC VAT):	**£140**
RATING:	**8/10**
VERDICT:	**A very good drive for general use that won't break the bank.**

Creative Gameblaster CD16

MANUFACTURED BY:	**Panasonic**
SPEED:	**Double**
DATA TRANSFER RATE:	**304Kb/s**
ACCURACY:	**98%**
STREET PRICE (INC VAT):	**£350**
RATING:	**8/10**
VERDICT:	**Ideal for the starter – everything in one box. The software is quite good.**

The GameBlaster is a complete package solution to upgrading. Open the box and you'll find a Creative-badged CD-ROM drive which is made by Panasonic and bears more than a passing resemblance to the CR-562-B. In fact, it's the same drive, so performance is identical. Delve deeper and you'll find a pair of reasonable quality speakers, an FX2000 joystick, a SoundBlaster 16 sound card with Panasonic interface and a selection of software on disc and floppy, including *Lemmings*, *Indianapolis 500*, *Syndicate*, *Iron Helix*, *Conspiracy*, *Sim City 2000* and some MicroProse games.

Provided there are no interrupt clashes, the sound card is inserted into a spare slot and connected to the drive itself. Run the floppy disk provided and, once the drive is running, the SoundBlaster CD provided will install the drivers for the sound card and additional software.

Hitachi CDR-6550

Hitachi's new SCSI drive is a low-priced, double speed unit. Having a SCSI (Small Computer Systems Interface) means that a different type of interface is required from the standard usually found on sound cards. This is resolved in two ways. Either you can buy a SoundBlaster 16 with SCSI-2 interface or you can buy a separate card. I would recommend the latter.

This is one of the fastest double speed drives I've tested and represents good value, especially if you already have a SCSI interface. The SCSI interface means that the access speeds are greatly improved. However, there is a price to pay. A SCSI interface is a lot more expensive than the normal interface, but it can take up to seven devices, like tape streamers, floptical drives and hard disk drives on the one card, so it could be advantageous in the long run.

MANUFACTURED BY:	**Hitachi**
SPEED:	**Double**
DATA TRANSFER RATE:	**340Kb/s**
ACCURACY:	**99%**
STREET PRICE (INC VAT):	**£160 (SCSI interface from around £50)**
RATING:	**9/10**
VERDICT:	**Fast and accurate, best of the bunch, though the SCSI interface is expensive.**

NEC 2Xi

MANUFACTURED BY:	**NEC**
SPEED:	**Double**
DATA TRANSFER RATE:	**300Kb/s**
ACCURACY:	**100%**
STREET PRICE (INC VAT):	**£170 (plus interface)**
RATING:	**8/10**
VERDICT:	**A slightly more expensive and slower drive, but gives good results.**

The first of two drives from NEC is this double speed unit. It varies slightly from the others in appearance as it has a door as well as the sliding tray. This is purely cosmetic and makes no difference to the performance. The drive feels good and is very well built. The drawer slides well and the access time is reasonable (as was found with all of the SCSI drives), but the access speeds are not much different from those found in the other drives. This is not really a problem – in fact, too much emphasis is usually placed on speed and the odd 10Kb/s between them really doesn't make that much difference.

A solid drive, this is slightly more expensive than the others and, although the quality shows, it is arguable as to whether it's worth the extra. Still, it's an excellent drive with a lot to commend it.

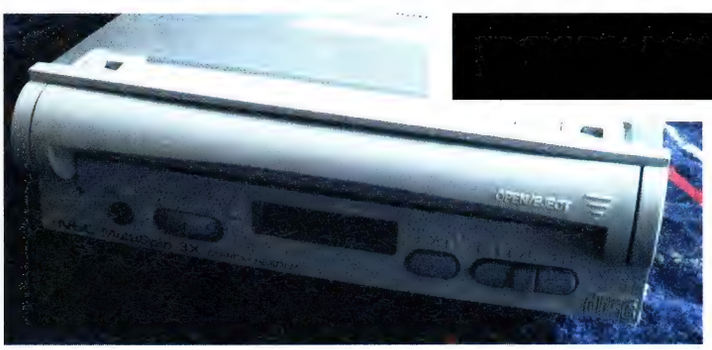
Mitsumi FX001D

The Mitsumi single speed drive was probably the most popular of all in the early days, because of its price. It had no motorised tray and was accessed by pushing the whole front panel, which released itself and the whole drawer slid out. Now the FX001D brings Mitsumi up to date. It's a double speed drive with a motorised tray and a price point that makes it attractive to the home user or anyone on a budget. It is supplied with all leads and its own interface card and can be bought for as little as £120 complete.

This drive is ideal for anyone who has a non-standard sound card or wants to run a separate interface card. There are no installation problems and, although the performance is not stunning, it is perfectly adequate. The motor on the tray does not exactly ooze quality, but it works perfectly well and should last long enough. A no-nonsense drive at an affordable price.

MANUFACTURED BY:	**Mitsumi**
SPEED:	**Double**
DATA TRANSFER RATE:	**297Kb/s**
ACCURACY:	**98%**
STREET PRICE (INC VAT):	**£120 including interface**
RATING:	**8/10**
VERDICT:	**A good 'no-frills' drive. Not the best quality, but certainly affordable.**

NEC 3Xi



MANUFACTURED BY:	**NEC**
SPEED:	**Triple**
DATA TRANSFER RATE:	**320-454Kb/s**
ACCURACY:	**100%**
STREET PRICE (INC VAT):	**£300**
RATING:	**7/10**
VERDICT:	**Overkill for home use. It will be ages before these drives are compulsory.**

This is one of a new breed of faster drives. I tested the speed using programs like *7th Guest* and *Conspiracy* which analyse your system. The first of these returned a speed of 454Kb/s, but *Conspiracy* made it 346Kb/s. Many other tests show that the actual speed varies and is dependent on your processor. I run a 486DX2-66 machine, so I would hope to make the most of a drive like this.

This is the only drive in our tests to have controls on the front, so you can use it as a stand-alone CD player, and the only one to use a caddy to carry the disc. There is no drive light to tell you when the disc is being accessed. Instead, there is an LCD panel that gives info on the status of the drive.

If you have money to spare, triple and even quad speed drives may be the way forward, but at the moment, for the home user certainly, these faster drives are not necessary.

Stuart Wynne: A Question of Depth

Opinion

The ever rising power of PCs and next generation consoles has led to talk of a 3-D revolution in gaming. "Screen-based 2-D games are a dead-end," proclaimed one magazine, "there is simply no comparison to an immersive 3-D experience."* In all sorts of ways, from *Doom* to *Ecstatica* to *Wing Commander III*, the 3-D revolution is on the move. The only question is, at what cost?

When Strauss Zelnick left 20th Century Fox to become the CEO of Crystal Dynamics he explained his move as being due to syntax. In the movie business the syntax, the structure of how scenes are composed, is pretty much set. Techniques such as close-ups, cutaways and so on are so well established as to be almost invisible to audiences. For videogames this is still mostly in flux, although certain 2-D game genres by their very simplicity can be quite formalised. The conventions of side-scrolling shoot'em-ups and platformers are very well known with their end-level bosses, power-up systems and general control types. While many are condemned as simply formulaic regurgitations of what's gone before, the programmer truly interested in gameplay can work wonders. Rasputin's *Jetstrike* looks like any other side-scroller, but with 150 fiendishly devised missions, 60 different types of aircraft and weapons, it's a constantly surprising and addictive challenge. Technically there's little new, but that's an advantage when it means that two years of development can go purely into gameplay.

3-D games are, by contrast, still desperately trying to fumble for a way to organise all their various tricks. For example, the failure of *Inferno* to live up to its mega-game status casts a considerable pall over the future of sim-type 3-D games. The freedom of movement offered by 3-D graphics is a Pyrrhic victory if there's no easy way to use it. The scale of the problem can be judged by *Inferno's* cheats: a purple nebula which serves as a fake horizon and the controls which pretend the spaceship is in an atmosphere. The absolute nadir of the 3-D revolution has to be *Autopilot 2* which has the computer do everything except press the firebutton.

Similarly, despite all the beautiful preview footage of *Wing Commander III*, most wizened journos are cynical about the actual gameplay. Whizzing about in three dimensions while trying to place a target cursor on a tiny spaceship isn't, in truth, all that big an advance over *Defender*. Whereas true aircraft combat has gravity and ground to twist the play dynamics, space offers no such constraints. A significant part of the problem of 3-D graphics is that they're fake. While VR headsets remain mired in medical and cost controversies, most 3-D games are viewed on 2-D monitors. A dot in the distance thus gives no depth perception to our eyes, judging its distance is purely down to HUD readouts. Even your own position is often unclear. While in a 2-D game your sprite is always on screen and clearly represented, with a 3-D game, showing your fighter normally obscures what you're fighting.

Perhaps all this is the reason why a game as dumb and simple as *Doom* is so successful. In *Doom* there is no confusion over interface control, simply spot the targets and press fire. It's a sad reflection on the 3-D revolution when gamers are reduced to raving over the fact a character can actually climb up steps and fall off walkways. As with *Inferno*, actual interaction is ultimately very simple – the difference is that the enemies are closer and more dramatic to shoot. Okay, *Doom* does have a nice multiplayer option but does anyone remember *Slimeworld* on the Lynx. Admittedly the graphics were untrendy 2-D, but the eight-player action included jetpacks, time bombs and loads of humour.

3-D games are what's fashionable, though, and they certainly come with a designer pricetag to match. This is because the graphics are being generated by the computer rather than being pre-drawn sprites, and 3-D graphics systems are under constant and costly evolution. Also, because of the way 3-D graphics move, they can't easily be optimised for the VGA graphics system the way sprites can. SVGA is increasingly seen as the future, yet despite the claims of some magazines, no game has yet cracked the problem of fast 3-D on a 486DX2. For many, games such as *Wing Commander III* and *Iron Angel* seem based on science fiction in their requirements just as much as in their scenarios.

Personally, I still have very high hopes for 3-D games. Relatively simple genres such as race sims, which operate largely on a 2-D plane, have good interfaces and are being revolutionised in their graphic appeal and playability. However, *Inferno's* flameout suggests the 3-D revolution is still some way from delivering games as rich in real, rather than perceived playability as antique-looking games like *Jetstrike*.

"The freedom of movement offered by 3-D games is a Pyrrhic victory if there's no easy way to use it. The problem with 3-D graphics is that they're fake."

* Editorial, Edge 3.

Rasputin's *Jetstrike* is currently only available on Amiga systems with the CD32 version being far the best due to a bigger challenge, CD music and, most importantly, a six button joypad. A PC version is in development.

That's NovaLogical Captain

Last night he dreamt of Armoured Fists, futuristic hovercrafts, Comanches and even a Werewolf. This morning he awoke in the new NovaLogic offices in deepest, darkest London. Paul Mallinson talked 3-D therapy with James Lamorticelli and Lee Milligan to try to overcome his fear of Volume Pixels.

Mention the name NovaLogic and many of you will immediately think *Comanche* – that fast-paced, all-action helicopter sim that blew away any gamer who had the chance to see it, let alone play it. The revolutionary Voxel (Volume Pixel) Space technology, patent-pending incidentally, allowed NovaLogic's developers to create believably solid 3-D landscapes that could be moved and manipulated in stunning real-time.

But that was almost two years ago and NovaLogic have new plans afoot – more games, more Voxel Space and, more importantly, a recently established UK base complete with its own development team. Once the usual teething troubles associated with the birth of a new company have been weeded out and settled down, PC gameplayers can expect a whole host of new and original NovaLogic game titles from the UK – complementing the Stateside development operations.

NovaLogic's new UK office is modest but temporary. Lee Milligan, Vice president and CFO, sits at his desk sifting through loose paperwork – probably CVs of prospective candidates for a place on one of their development teams. Then again, they could be bills. I don't ask.

In real life James Lamorticelli is NovaLogic's Director of Marketing and PR, but at the moment he's driving over smoke-strewn hills in an American M1A2, firing high explosive shells at Russian T-80s. He's playing NovaLogic's latest combat simulator; *Armoured Fist*. The huge PC screen in front of us lights up with bright flashes – the sound emanating from the speakers echoes the on-screen chaos. It's all very loud and confusing – just as combat should be; as Samuel Fuller (director of cult WWII movie, The Big Red One) once said, "The only way of conveying the noise and confusion of the battlefield would be to deafen and blind the audience with real explosions, screams and flying bullets." The explosions and bullets I can do without – the sound bit works though.

James turns the sound down for the moment as I ask how finished this version of *Armoured Fist* actually is.

"It's pretty finished," said James. "I know that since we've been at the European Computer Trade Show our US development team have changed some of the mission designs – they have put in some new terrain and nailed down the artificial intelligence, making it extremely accurate." The Russian tanks were giving James a very hard time. Earlier he'd completed his very first mission but had been fighting not only against the enemy, but also against a few minor bugs that still had to be ironed out.

"The Target Lock was, what you guys call, 'dodgy', but now it works well and is very precise." As another T-80 'brewed-up' under a hail of fire, James explained what was left to do. "Basically that type of thing has been added and refined. The terrain is still undergoing slight changes – some of the terrain will be more mountainous like in *Comanche*. It's pretty much come to the point where we are just fine-tuning it."

As I mentioned earlier, NovaLogic are known primarily for their Voxel Space software – *Comanche* et al. Not knowing much about the company before those ground-breaking games, I asked James to fill me in on its history.

"NovaLogic started in 1985." That surprised me for starters. James continued. "John Garcia, who is the President/CEO of the company, worked for Data Soft. He worked on *Zaxxon*." He worked on *Zaxxon*?! Anyone familiar with 80's software will no doubt remember that particular 3-D shoot'em-up.

"When Data Soft ended up being bought out and closed, John started NovaLogic – he had the background and the programming knowledge, and wanted to start a new company of his own. One of his projects was for a company called Chevron, am I right Lee?" James trails off, aiming a knowing smile in the direction of Lee Milligan.

"Yeah – a database manager for plant selection! You typed in your latitude and longitude, what kind of plant you wanted and it would give you a list of plants that would grow in that kind of climate... and what Chevron products you should use to grow them! (laughs)." But what after the 'grow your own' program?

"They then worked on various Taito arcade conversions," continued James.

"A lot of console stuff – *Bubble Bobble, Renegade...*" added Lee.

"Next was *Rocketeer* for Disney on the Super NES, and *Wolfpack*, which was licensed to Mirrorsoft over here. *Wolfpack* was the original PC version with only twelve missions, and then after that came *Comanche* which really blew the lid off – since then the company has grown an incredible amount."

So, as with any long-established software development/publishing company, there are a few skeletons hidden in the proverbial closet. A few gems too – I remember *Bubble Bobble* being

"James Lamorticelli, NovaLogic's Director of Marketing & PR, drives over smoke-strewn hills in an American M1A2, firing high explosive shells at Russian T-80s."

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Armoured Fist promises to be an involved and complex tank simulator. The pre-rendered intro sequences have to be seen to be believed.

a huge hit at the time. Lee points out a few other hidden points about NovaLogic's past history:

"We're mainly known as a PC developer, because that's the only platform we publish for, but we have also done a lot of console work – mainly R&D for the hardware manufacturers. They see us as one of a group of developers who can help them 'wring out' their machines. We did very early R&D for Sega, though we never published anything for them. We did the launch software for their Virtual Reality system."

I then wondered what the future held. With the recent establishment of NovaLogic Ltd, and the announcement that the company were to be developing their own software within the UK, I asked James where the development teams were to be based – after all, I could see no programmer within the immediate vicinity.

"Oh, our development teams will be based here, but they won't be starting for another week or two. The things that they will be working on here will be from scratch. Both companies (NovaLogic US and UK) will be assisting each other if they need help on various projects, so there will be a fair degree of collaboration between the US and UK teams."

Unlike years ago, when a single programmer would sit down, code the entire game, create all the graphics and write all the music, these days everything is created by large teams – with each individual specialising in one particular area (graphics, sound, code, etc.). Even though NovaLogic's new offices are temporary, I did have visions of overcrowding. How many people were these guys going to fit into this room?

"Hopefully, in the next couple of months, there will be about six or more full-time staff here to start things off." By the time they reach full steam, maybe more space will be available!

Unfortunately, both James and Lee were reluctant to discuss future UK game plans, so I switched my focus to the other side of the Atlantic and asked them what they could tell us about.

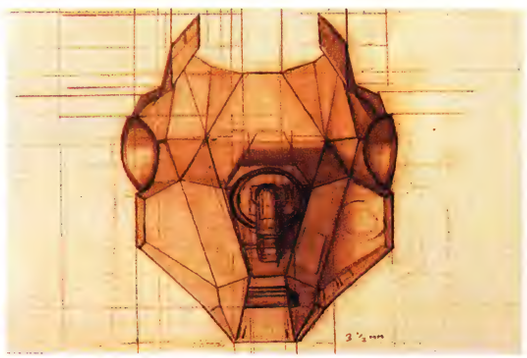
"We're working on a new project called *Hard Wired*, which is based on a Cyberpunk novel by Walter John Williams. The premise of the book, and the game, is that you play a smuggler in a futuristic world that has been divided into various territories. You fly a hovercraft vehicle that has to transport cargo from territory to territory. The engine is already up and running – the hovercraft is flying. It's as fast a bullet across the terrain.

This will be NovaLogic's largest production to date in that it will be more of a mainstream game. Again we will be using Voxel Space technology in addition to live-action video footage and pre-rendered, 3-D animation. We're hoping it will be a very cinematic game and we're also looking forward to creating this different style of game – you know; getting away from the military simulation."

Branching out into different areas of the PC games market will definitely be advantageous to these guys – 'don't put your eggs in one basket', and all that. James agrees:

"I think our niche is in 3-D-based games – it's our strong point – developing Voxel Space technology, refining it as it goes along, but I think that, as the company grows, it would be natural to get into other types of genre as well."

At this point a question about their much-touted Voxel Space system sprang to mind; bearing in mind that NovaLogic have applied for a patent for this particular style of graphic presentation, does the fact that rival developers have started to use similar technology in their



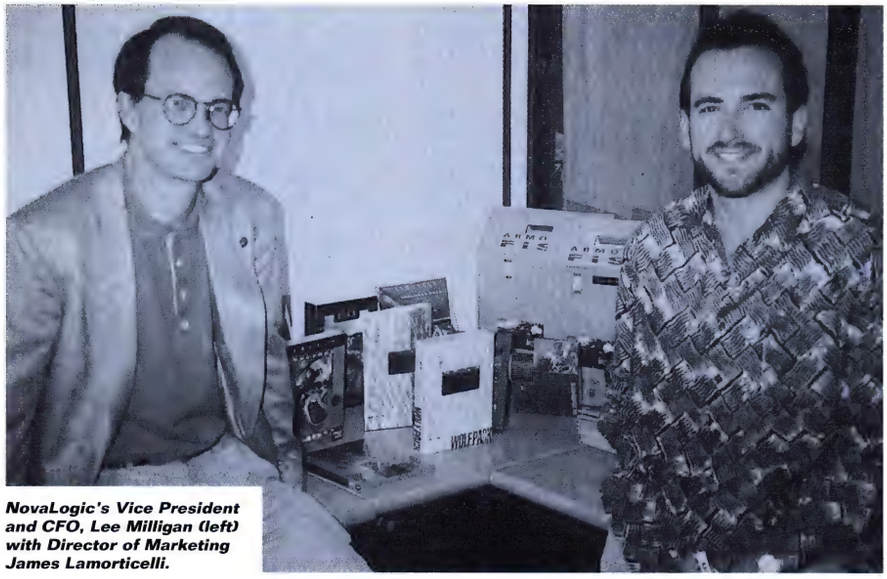
Hard Wired will be NovaLogic's biggest project to date – using full motion video and real actors to create a true movie experience.

games (*Robinson's Requiem, Lords of Midnight,* to name but two) worry them?

"Not really," said James. "In each product that we do, the technology is constantly being refined. For *Armoured Fist* the routines had to be changed considerably in order to accommodate the ground combat simulation gameplay, because the *Comanche* engine didn't really work for the tanks. Part of the development process was that they had to change and refine the game engine to suit the new environment."

Did the developers ever consider a 640x480x256 SVGA display?

Lee, quiet for some time, rose to answer: "They did consider it, but ruled it out because of speed restrictions. We have always been a developer for leading edge machines. When *Comanche* came out it was optimised for 386/486 machines, at a time when a lot of people were telling us that it had to be 286 compatible – and it needed 4 Meg, and they were saying; 'Well people don't have 4 Meg'. The reality is that the hardware base is expanding so fast, it really pays to develop for the 'leading edge'. *Armoured Fist* will run on a 486 with 4 Meg – it will really like 8 Meg, but will also take advantage of 16 Meg. So the people with the extra memory will really benefit from it." Sure, but they will also have to pay for it. I suppose I had to get that one in somewhere, didn't I?



NovaLogic's Vice President and CFO, Lee Milligan (left) with Director of Marketing James Lamorticelli.

"Our new project, *Hard Wired*, is based on a Cyberpunk novel by Walter John Williams. You play a futuristic smuggler, flying around in a hovercraft."

Only recently have developers realised how successful multi-player games can be. *Doom* certainly caused a frenzy for link-up games – now everyone wants to produce a game where you can shoot or team up with your friends for fun. Bullfrog are doing it with *Magic Carpet,* Origin are doing it with *Wing Armada* and Sierra are doing it with their *Metaltech* series of games – but are NovaLogic going to be doing it with their games? *Comanche* and *Armoured Fist* seem likely candidates for head-to-head action. I asked James if there were plans to put multi-player options in their games.

"Not as this point. Probably what we will do before that is some type of modem play for *Armoured Fist.* It would be a lot of work to link the different games together."

"It's also hard to see how you could get a good balance in the game. The helicopters are very fast – covering a lot of territory over a very short period of time, whereas a tank is kind of slow," Lee adds afterwards.

Well if you team up together, the helicopter could look out for the tank, with the tank looking out for the helicopter...

Pausing to consider my suggestion, Lee re-thought: "The game engines are fairly similar – certainly the terrain engines are similar, so I suppose it is possible. A lot of people have asked for it. But as Jimmy said, the first step will be head-to-head helicopter/head-to-head tank." So I'll take the answer to my question as 'yes' – exactly the word I was looking for. But the NovaLogic link-up debate didn't end there, as James went on to explain:

"In the spring we will be coming out with a product called *Werewolf* – a KA-50 helicopter simulator – and that will have modem play too."

I asked James if he'd heard about Virgin's imminent KA-50 simulator.

"Yeah, *Hokum.* They originally planned to call their game *Werewolf* but we had the licence so they had to change it. Ours will again be a Voxel Space game, but we're also hoping that players will be able to link *Werewolf* with *Comanche* and take each other on."

So at last we're getting some commitment to head-to-head link-up play. Being a big fan of *Comanche,* I toy with the idea of asking them to sign a legal document committing them to the idea. I keep the thought to myself, preferring instead to ask them why they think link-up play is presently so popular.

"At present it's very popular because it's something new and everybody wants to be part of it," says James. "It allows people to experience something as a group – it makes it more interactive... You know; you sit here playing this game and you're interacting, but if you're playing over a modem or network you're not only playing a game yourself but you're also interacting with other people. You're thinking on a different level."

As the answer trails away into the distance we huddle round a large PC monitor as *Armoured Fist* is once again put through its paces. James demonstrates some of the more complicated features of the game – the mission builder, night vision, artillery and air support. I am then invited to try the game for myself. Remembering how much difficulty James had in dispatching an earlier set of Russian T-80s, I gripped the Thrustmaster Flight Stick in trepidation. Would I make a fool of myself and die within seconds? No. To my, and their, surprise I annihilated every single tank with very little trouble. Either they're not that good at playing games, or they switched it to 'easy' mode when I wasn't looking.

I asked James how committed NovaLogic are to the PC market – hoping that they weren't going to jump ship and devote all of their time and resources to 'super console' development.

"In the United States our focus is on the PC, but we're starting to get into Mac development." James assured me.

Lee was less reassuring: "It is fair to say that we'll be doing work on the next generation of consoles. We've been working in the PC environment for years – mainly because it was the most powerful platform that had any kind of home base. Now with the next generation of consoles you will find that a lot of the 3-D, point-of-view technologies that we have developed for the PC work very well in these new environments. The new consoles have 3-D specific hardware, and we're a 3-D company."

To be honest though, until the so-called 'super consoles' arrive, PC users haven't really got that much to worry about. With NovaLogic's *Hard Wired, Werewolf* and *Armoured Fist* either in full swing or ready for imminent release, we're going to be playing cutting-edge software for a very long time to come. **PC POWER**

Mark Hamill, Chris Roberts and WC3

It's rare to interview one bright spark in the industry, let alone two. Dino Boni and Paul Mallinson spent some time with Chris Roberts and the legendary Mark Hamill, and talked about life, the universe and *Wing Commander 3*.

1989 in Austin, Texas was just like any other year, until a bright spark by the name of Chris Roberts hit on a new idea. The standard presentation of computer games had reached the end of its useful life and a new direction was needed. Maybe games should become more like films, but how could it be done?

Roberts answered his own question with the release of *Wing Commander I & 2*, two products which changed the way people played games forever. These epic space operas used animated cut-sequences to create a game with a distinct cinematic edge, using the player as the star of the show. Roberts had hit on something new, and it made him a household name throughout the PC gaming world.

Over the last few years, Roberts has been working on the latest game in the series, *Wing Commander 3*. Featuring a new graphics engine and complete full-motion, full action video, *WC* looks set to revolutionise the way we play games – again. The casting line-up for the full-motion video sequences reads like an encyclopaedia of cult movie stars. Mark Hamill (of Star Wars fame) plays the part of Chris Blair, your alter-ego in the game, while other stars include Malcolm McDowell (A Clockwork Orange), John Rhys-Davis (Indiana Jones) and Ginger Lynn Allen (ex-porn star!).

How was the casting done for such a difficult project? "I got a couple of casting directors out of LA and we went through a list of about two thousand people," Chris told us. "We then cut it down to about a hundred people, which was a tough task. I went up to LA and did casting sessions and I picked about 20 applicants out of those hundred. I don't usually cast Americans, but this time it was pretty crucial to us to get really high-level talent and this is the best place to get it. For the crew, I tried to get as many people involved who'd had experience in this kind of thing before."

Mark Hamill was one of those 20 people who were finally chosen for the game, but, surprisingly, he had never played the original *WC* games prior to the project, despite his love of computer games. "I met with Chris and spoke to him about *Wing Commander 3*. At first I felt like saying 'Woah! What happened to the first two?!', but he gave me the background of it all and that made it a little better, plus I didn't feel like I was joining an established franchise, I was just embodying what had previously been an animated character."

Because Hamill had never played the previous games before, Chris was often called in to explain the relationship between the characters, story and plot. "Chris was crucial to us. He was like having a walking bible right on the set at all times, because it's a whole new world for us actors. Sometimes you think, 'Wait a minute, who is this guy and where did I meet him?'. Chris was there though, to explain it all if we got stuck – things sometimes got very frightening. I can remember thinking 'Aahh, can we do this?', but it turned out okay in the end.

The filming for *WC3* took place in Texas using chroma-key technology. This is where the actors play their roles in front of a blank wall, and are then superimposed onto computer-generated backgrounds, eliminating the need for expensive sets. This can be tough for actors who have always had a set around them, as Mark found out. "I always made sure that I could see the monitor from where I was, so I could get this idea of how I looked. The storyboards and storyboard artist were always around to tell us how a scene was supposed to look.

"There was a nice feeling on the set because we had a traditional Hollywood crew, but the brains of the organisation were the Texans. They're not kind of 'cynical, seen it all, Los Angeles' types and there was a freshness about it all. It wasn't the same old group that we're all used to."

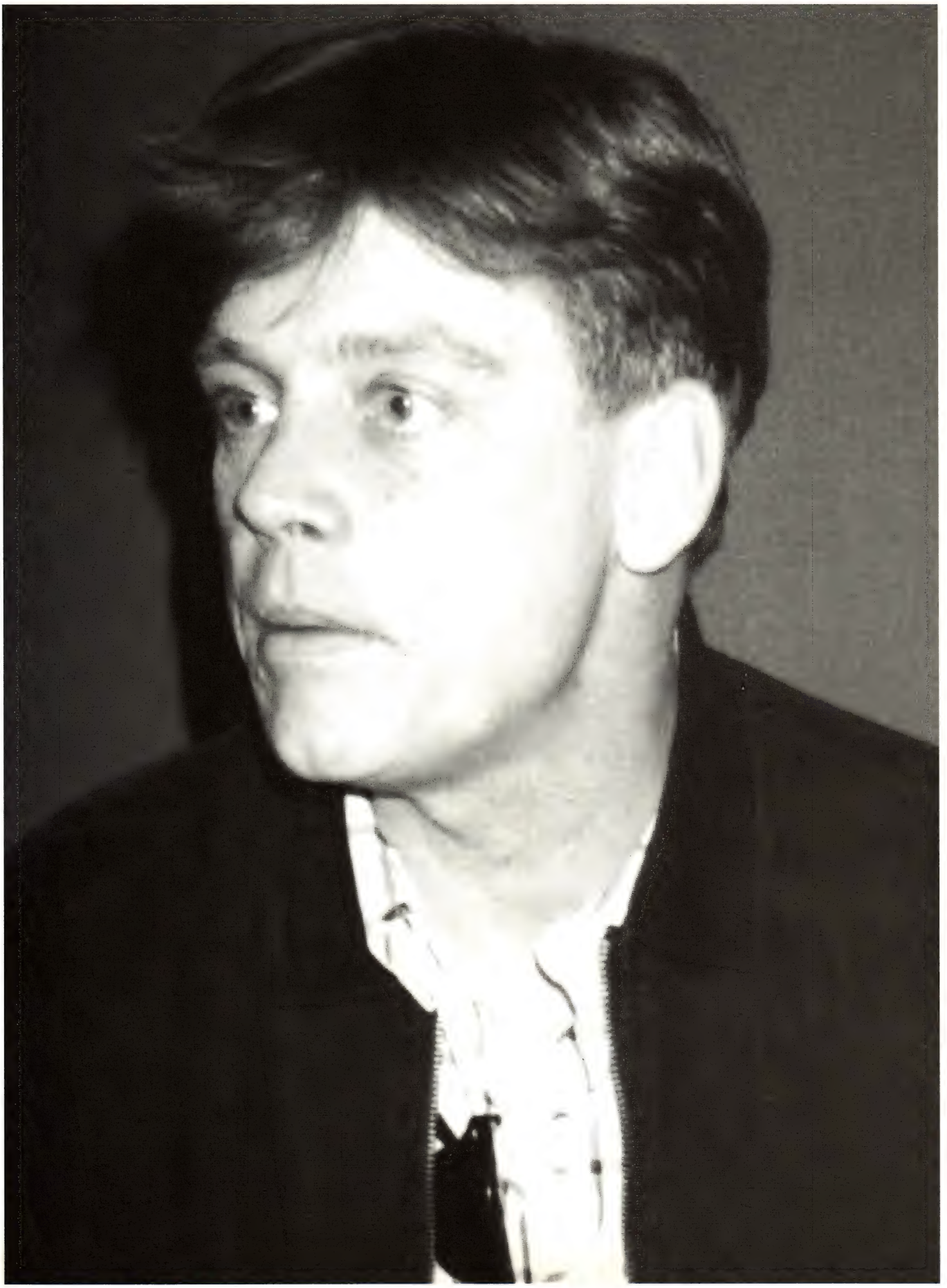
Chris Roberts directed the filming, which was quite a step away from the programming role he normally takes. Usually he is only content with doing everything on a game that he can, but Chris realised that with this project he had to face the facts and choose where to make his mark. Was he happy about his reduced role in *WC3*? "Yes, I was. *WC3* is such a huge project that I can only either take part in the film aspect or the coding aspect of the game. I had to draw the line somewhere, so I chose to pass the rest to Frank, the guy who is in charge of the coding side of *WC3*. I made a deal with Frank. Basically I said 'I will deliver you all the film stuff and you give me all the games stuff and then we'll put it all together!' I knew he was the right person because when he joined the company his Illinois licence plate read 'WING COMMANDER 1'."

The music in the game adds to the cinematic experience, enriching the atmosphere of the game to bursting point. Although it sounds like it has been performed by an orchestra, a few good synthesisers and some clever coding were all that were needed to bring the quality of the music beyond anything heard before. Did they plan on using an orchestra first? "Well, actually no," said Chris. "We wanted to, but in the end we had to synthesise it. We used real high-end equipment, and it's all digitally streamed from the CD. That's why it sounds much better."

The video also uses a software compression

"*Wing Commander 3* is such a huge project, Chris Roberts had to pass the whole of the coding side to another guy, known as Frank. Chris knew he was the right person because when he joined the company his licence plate read 'WING COMMANDER 1'."

Feature: Mark Hamill



technique that is faster than some MPEG boards currently on the market. Designed specifically for this game, this is one part of *Wing Commander 3* that Roberts is really proud of. "The thing I have always hated in full motion games is that all you can see is a small window of jerky film. To get the suspension of disbelief going for me, the video has to be full-screen. I have some great programmers who did it, and I don't think I could have done it myself. I am really happy with the whole full motion play back, because it is what will make the game really stand out."

The similarities between *Wing Commander* and Star Wars are pretty obvious, even to the occasional gamesplayer. Mark has always been remembered for his role as Luke Skywalker, rather than for his other roles on Broadway and in other films that never made it to this country. This doesn't phase him, however, and he's not afraid of being type-cast into another version of Luke. "On the surface, Star Wars and *Wing Commander* are not too similar. Luke is a farm boy and Blair is a war-weary veteran. I didn't really realise how similar they were until I was already well into the project and it wasn't something that hit me straight away when I first read the massive script. I don't know why, maybe because I have done many other things since. But I do realise that most people don't know me for anything but that one big film, and that's why they see the similarity. They don't know that I did work in New York all those years. That's okay, as you get older, you don't care quite so much [smiles]."

The similarities between *WC* and Star Wars are partly due to Roberts' fascination with the trilogy. "The Star Wars movies are the best science fiction movies there are," he declared. Mark was keen to add his own two cents' worth on the subject. "On a film level, Star Wars and *Wing Commander* are completely different. Star Wars is science fantasy, not science fiction. Sci-fi is a projection of the future, based on science that we know now. Star Wars is a space-related fairy tale. Sci-fi is more evident in *Wing Commander*.

"It's one of those things," Chris continued. "Part of *WC3* comes from Star Wars, but it's not trying to be like it. I like the scale, I like the presentation."

"Yeah, but a Kilrathi could kick a Wookie's butt!" laughed Hamill. 'Nuff said, I think!

The other actors and actresses involved may not be in the limelight as much as Mark, but they still have unique personalities to add to the game. Ginger Lynn Allen is a beautiful ex-porno star, which didn't cause as many problems as you may think. "We were really excited," said Mark. "The thing is, my wife and I went through our porno phase about eight years ago, so I have never seen any of her output (no pun intended). I have never seen her erotic film career, and I was thinking, 'That's a first for me' because I am working with someone that, if I wanted to, I could go out and see naked! Everyone else on the crew seemed to know everything about her, and when we compared notes we were much more inhibited about talking about it than she was. When I read some interviews that had been done with her, about how she felt, I thought – 'Boy, she has got it much more together than we have!'. We were all acting like adolescent boys and she was like, 'Yeah I did it, it's over and now I am ready for new stuff'."

"So I brought these sun glasses, right, but there's no sun in England!". Nice one Mark...

The film star starts his rise to worldwide fame. Believe it or not, Star Wars is now 18 years old.

Chris Blair is your alter-ego in Wing Commander 3. You can control the way he talks to people in-between missions.

Chris Roberts wonders why Mark suddenly looks like he's not slept for a week. That's jet-lag for you, I suppose.

Mark's wife was very understanding, as two of the characters in *WC3* (Ginger Lynn Allen and another female pilot) have romantic designs on poor old Chris Blair, much the same as Angel did in the second *Wing Commander* game. Mark told us, "You know what wives are like. They say 'Oh, those aren't real!' when they see a girl who's, erm, larger than they are. Now, when we go to the beach, I make her pick out the guy that she would most like to have an affair with. You want something to keep it interesting after 16 years, believe me!"

The filming is complete and the game is almost finished. We saw the full, 12 minute long intro to the game, which is a mini film in itself. This (as well as the first few missions) were all we could see, as the project is still in its closing stages, but it was enough. The intro alone is the best thing that we've ever seen in a game. But what did Mark himself think of the product, and would he be doing any more acting for games? "I haven't seen it all the way through. I have only seen what you have seen here, although you could go up to editing on the set and see the previous day's scenes being edited. It's extraordinary, compared to normal filming. I just enjoyed it so much, it's a challenge. I love games and puzzles. It was fun trying to give them what they wanted, once I understood what it was, so the answer is 'Yeah, I hope so!'

"I hope we can expand and go beyond this kind of genre. I hate that word – but you know what I mean. You find yourself thinking 'Hey, could this work in a 30's Sam Spade kind of adventure, or could it work in a Tennessee Williams-type character study?'. It's a tricky thing, because I don't have any knowledge of the market for games. I went to the airport and saw *Wing Commander* T-shirts and I would be interviewed by people like yourself and they would say 'You don't have a clue as to how big this is, do you?'.

"I feel like I am on the crest of a wave and I hope that it is going to be something exciting... I'm going to hope for the best and expect the worst," he concludes. Well, if this brief but exciting glimpse of *Wing Commander 3* is anything to go by, then I don't think that Mark or Chris have got anything to worry about. PC POWER

The Plot

The story continues from *WC2*. The Kilrathi are hell-bent on destroying every human being they can find, and the Confederation is having a tough time fending them off. You rejoin the story after the destruction of the Concordia, the Terran fleet's flagship, when morale is lower than ever before. Your new post doesn't cheer you up much either, as your assigned ship is more a bucket of bolts than a fighting spaceship. Still, you have some old friends aboard and the battle recommences, hopefully for the last time.

"On a film level Star Wars and *Wing Commander* are completely different. Star Wars is science fantasy, not science fiction. Sci-fi, like *WC*, is a projection of the future, based on science that we know now. Star Wars is a space-related fairy-tale."

Feature: Mark Hamill

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REVIEW INDEX

It's been an odd month. Many of the pant-wetting goodies seen at the ECTS were tantalisingly just beyond the reviewable stage, and other goodies, which we've been waiting to plop on our mat for ages, still haven't materialised. But are we downhearted? Never! The selection this month may be short, but it's very, very sweet, with an EXCLUSIVE on the retina-scorching Rise of the Robots – the first SVGA beat'em-up with 3D Studio models. Dave says "Nice!"

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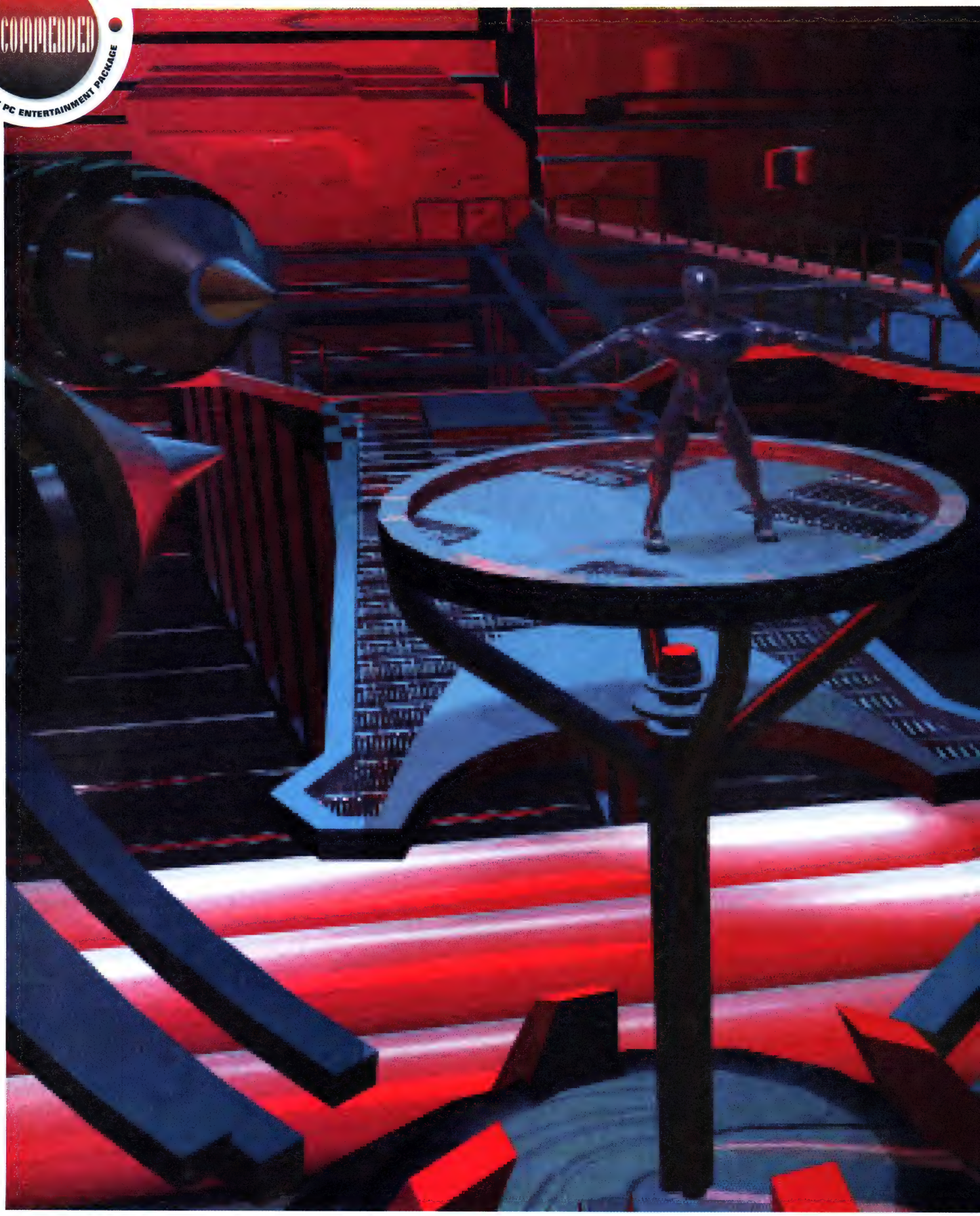
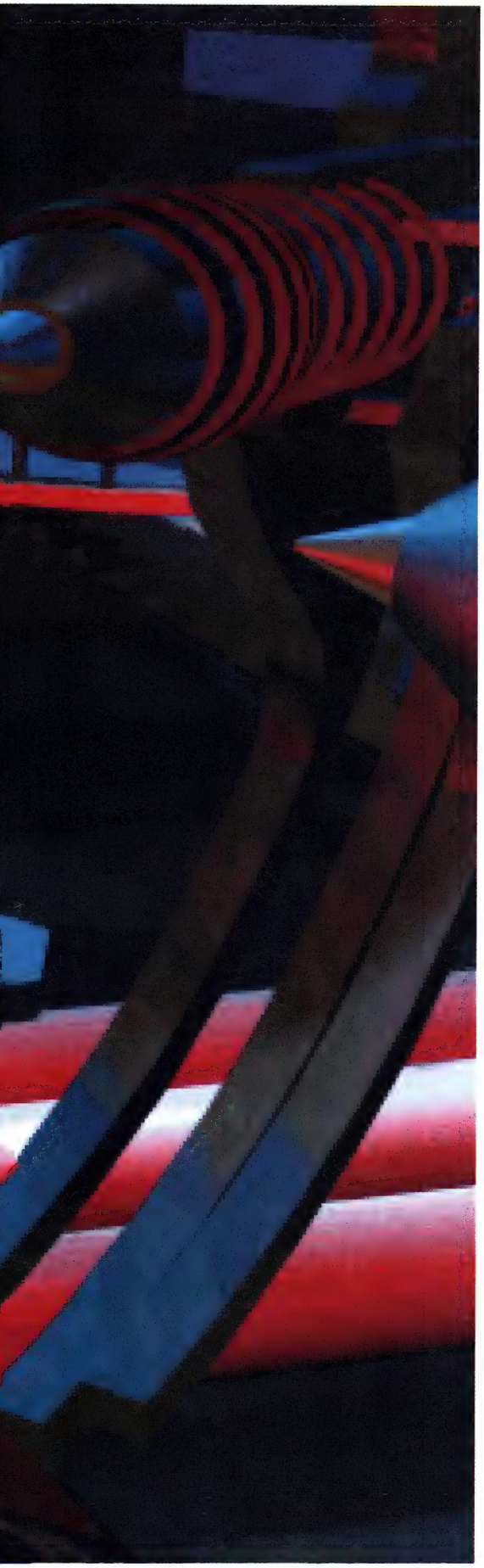


Review: Rise of the Robots



Rise of the Robots

What can be written about *Rise Of The Robots* that hasn't already? A scoop review, that's what.

Rise Of The Robots was previewed in PC Power's first issue, way back in January, nearly a whole year ago now. The erstwhile PC Power editor, Alan Bunker, then wrote: "Available for your PC very soon, expect a full review next issue." Oh what a duffer he was. Ten months on and only now do we get a reviewable copy, and even so, we're the first ones in the country – in the whole world, in fact – to do so.

Any game that's been threatening to come out for so long, naturally raises expectations, and the level of anticipation for *Rise Of The Robots* is nothing short of extraordinary. At least part of this is undoubtedly derivative of the near continuous stream of media coverage on the game. This is the kind of product magazines love to cover; its hi-resolution SVGA images transforming even the most drab and poorly designed pages into wondrous pieces of art. Edge magazine wrote "graphics to die for." And most art editors duly did, over-exerting themselves in getting their editorial counterparts to devote a copious number of pages to the game.

The thing is, until last month's PC Power coverdisc demo, no one had a clue what the game was like. It might well have turned out to be the computer game equivalent of the great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle: 6 flash robots who might well have been able to sing, but certainly couldn't fight with any great degree of skill. Indeed, that's what many cynical, over-worked hacks believed. Not only did the game suffer from that tell-tale syndrome of being put back again and again, but its graphics seemed too good to be true. If it was possible to move around hi-res, 3D Studio objects with any degree of fluidity, why had no one done so before? Obviously they couldn't. Obviously *Rise Of The Robots* was going to be crap. Obviously.

And, in a sense, those journalists were right to be so smug in the certainty of their belief. Read the requirements on the back of the box and you'll find out that the minimum requirements for the game is a 486SX-25Mhz PC with 4Mb of RAM and SVGA monitor (it's recommended that you have a 486DX2-66Mhz machine with 8Mb of RAM and SVGA monitor). 10 months ago, asking for that kind of set-up would have been taking the Mickey – the 'average' PC owner would then have had a 386 – and only a small elite had the ninja PC to play the game on. Now, however, it's a different story. With the likes of *Magic Carpet* and *NASCAR Racing* recommending a Pentium, *Rise's* need for a 486 doesn't seem to be asking for too much.

"One of the hardest things to do is to be able to predict the future," says Sean Griffiths, designer and producer for *Rise*. "If you're going to be working on something for two years you need to 'know' what kind of technology is going to be around when it's finished, and I think for this game we got it almost exactly right. For the sequel we're going to have to work out what comes out after the Pentium."

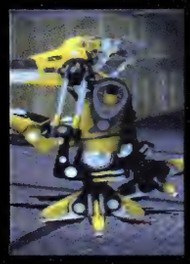
Isn't she a beauty

Rise Of The Robots is the best looking, most beautiful beat'em-up on any format – ever. It is, simply, a wonderful, wondrous piece of art that transcends all that has gone before it – and, no doubt, that which will go ahead of it for a very, very long time.

It is these graphics that make this game special. Though it's true to say that the way a game looks is relatively unimportant so long as it plays and plays well, it is also true that once you

"*Rise* might well have turned out to be the gaming equivalent of the Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle: indeed that's what many cynical hacks believed."

Mechanical Monstrosities



The Loader is based on the one used by Ripley in Aliens. Its special move is the Double Fork Slash. It's slow and clumsy and shouldn't be too hard to beat.

The Ape is a huge, fat and lumbering creature. Slow, but powerful, two hits with its Pile Driver or its Bomber Jump will leave you on the floor crying for your mum.

The Crusher has the Pincer Mincer, a long arm with whirling blades that'll slice right through you. Were you human, the effect would be disgusting.

The Military Droid or Exterminator is a shimmering, shiny, metallic droid with the Cyber Slash, the ability to extend his long, sharp nails to slice through you.

The Sentry is the most impressive robot, a giant, red, anime style thing that flies into the air, jet-kicking opponents in the face. He fills nearly half the screen.

Every move of the Supervisor's is special. As well as the Praying Mantis (arms and legs turning into spikes) she can also 'melt', and so regain lost energy.

can go no further with gameplay in a particular genre, the only thing that is left to do is to alter the gamesplayer's perception of what's happening audio-visually. This may sound very superficial, but it doesn't have to be. The addition of blood in *Mortal Kombat* transformed what would have been a very average, and slightly silly, beat'em-up into one of the most exciting games of its day. The 'gore' not only made the game more 'risqué', but also added a B-movie feel to the game which managed to heighten the game's already inherent tension.

Rise Of The Robots allows the player, for the very first time, to play with photo-realistic sprites, moving against a photo-realistic background. That's the only difference between this and any other beat'em-up. The only difference. And yet to say that the difference between *Rise Of The Robots* and another beat'em-up is merely a difference in style – the replacement of oils with watercolours – though true, would not only be facile, it would also be missing the point. If a little bit of blood, with the connotations that it brings, can make the impact it did in the original *Mortal Kombat* game, *Rise Of The Robots'* photo-realism should, in a fair world at least, bring the world to its collective knees.

Ego virus

Rise offers the player a one or two-player mode. In the one-player mode you play as the Cyborg, a half-human, half-robot creature, sent into a futuristic manufacturing plant to 'close down' a number of robots affected with an 'ego' virus. Naturally, you start with easiest of enemies, The Loader, and finish with the toughest, the silvery, T2-inspired, Supervisor. There are four other droids in-between: The Builder or the Ape, The Crusher, The Military Droid or Exterminator and the Sentry, a magnificent, blood-red, Japanese-style droid. On the two-player mode you can play as any one of these droids, in any order, against anyone, any time you please.

Each of these robots has either one or two special moves. Only the Cyborg has three. These are all fairly easy to execute with simple Left-Right-Punch style combinations (see box). There are also a number of moves that all of the robots will have access to: Invisibility (though shadows will remain); Invincibility (for a brief period) and a move to reverse your opponent's control mechanism(!). For the complete novice, Mirage have also included an option to turn off the special moves to allow easy entry into the game.

Because the PC's joystick/pad has only two buttons (unlike the Super Nintendo's six) Mirage have had to replace the hard but slow hit button and the soft, quick jab one with a fairly nifty bit of design. The power of your shot is now determined by how long you hold down the 'hit' button. Tap it and the Cyborg will jab. Hold it down and a power bar at the top of the screen will move upwards to illustrate the increasing power that the punch will have when you move to strike. It's not, of course, as intuitive as a different button for each, different kind of hit but it works well enough, and after a few games becomes pretty much second nature.

Where *Rise Of The Robots* is perhaps the weakest is in its AI. What Andy Clark has done is to make the game monitor what kind of shots the player performs, determine how good they are, and make the computer character respond accordingly. "We have a sort of grid with all of the moves on it," says Sean. "All of the weakest moves are on one side, and all of the strongest moves are on the other. If you play a number of good shots the computer will take note of that and step up a gear and go onto the next level of moves." The problem with such a system, as Sean readily admits, is that the best move to make in a particular situation, isn't necessarily the strongest one.

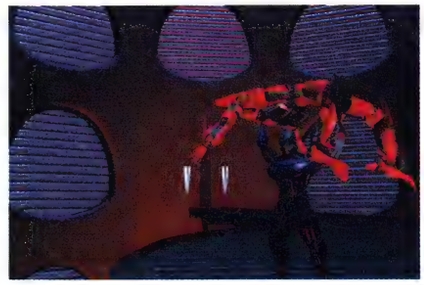
You don't actually notice this in play, however. In fact, the game has only one obvious weakness and that is the ability to trap your opponent in a corner, and keep him there with a succession of hits and kicks. The original *Street Fighter II* suffered from the same problem on the Super Nintendo, until *SFII Turbo* came along and remedied it. Fortunately, according to Griffiths, *Rise Of The Robots* will also have taken care of the problem by the time it's released: "What we're going to do is to reduce the amount of energy your opponent will take off you when you're stuck in a corner. That way, it's not going to do him any good keeping you there, so he might just as well release you."

Interactive movie??

Rise Of The Robots is a beat'em-up. I know I keep saying that, but anticipation for the game has produced expectations of nothing short of the Second Coming. Take the game home for an 'out of this world' experience and you'll be sorely disappointed. But take the game as just that – a game – and you'll wish all of your games were this good. Certainly *Rise's* production values are unparalleled – the game has been described by some magazines as an 'interactive movie' and the 3D Studio cut sequences really are of that quality. It's crucial to note, however, that the

There's a war a comin'

The only game in the dim and distant future that looks as though it has a chance to rival *Rise Of The Robots'* crown is Argonaut's *FX Fighter* (working title only). It uses polygons, a la Virtua Fighting, rather than 3-D Studio rendered objects, which means that a great deal of processing power is freed up for more whizzy 'effects'. One of the shortcomings of *ROTR* is that the camera never pans, and that the screen never scrolls – simply because of the amount of RAM it would require to process the millions of colours and pixels. The result of this may be that, though *FX Fighter* won't be as beautiful to look at, it may well be a whole lot more dynamic. (See news, page 10).



Accompanying the glorious images is a soundtrack from Brian May who has written a song especially for the game. It's called Cyborg and it's a bit good. Better than his ad track anyway.

quality of the graphics is just as good (if a little less contrived) in the in-game action. The result is that Utopia of a seamless game, one that's coherent enough, visually, to truly deserve that title of the 'interactive movie'.

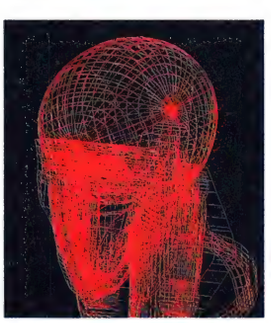
But, of course, people don't buy games because they're interactive movies, they buy them because they're fun to play. And *Rise Of The Robots* is fun to play – incredibly fun to play – if you like beat'em-ups. It's hugely superior to *Street Fighter II* (on the PC) and much, much better than the oh so adequate *Mortal Kombat*. To say that *Rise Of The Robots* is the best beat'em-up on the PC wouldn't be saying much, though – it wins the contest almost by default – the competition is just crap.

So I'll be brave then and say that *Rise Of The Robots* represents a game on a par with any of its hugely acclaimed peers, on any format. While the gameplay is okay, it isn't as finely tuned as, say *SFII*. But then *Mortal Kombat's* engine wasn't quite as good either. What both games have, and *Rise* has to excess, is a palpable atmosphere. Playing against 3D Studio characters in an arena that looks, to all intents and purposes, real is an experience you're just going to have to try. Or be cursed forever by the knowledge that you sorely missed out on one of the classic gaming experiences of your lifetime.

● **DAVE WESTLEY**

Blue Peter

Building up the robots in *ROTR* is a gradual process. First a 3-D model is made up in wireframe in Autodesk's 3-D Studio. This is a very atomistic process with each part of the body constructed separately. It's at this stage that the designer works out how a particular object is going to move. Surprisingly, the less human the robot, the easier it is to make it move realistically. The second stage is to render the wireframe. This is a job for 3-D Studio itself, which will also apply light sourcing at this stage (so long as you tell it where to put it). After you've rendered your object it'll still be too clean, too artificial – too plasticy, according to Sean Griffiths, to use. The final stage is used to counter this, to texture objects with a skin that roughens the robot up a little.



FULL POWER

Rise Of The Robots
Publisher: Mirage/Time Warner
Contact: 0260-299-909
Price: £49.99 (CD); 45.99 (SVGA disk); 42.99 (VGA disk); 59.99 (Special).

REQUIREMENTS

SVGA version: 486SX-25Mhz; SVGA graphics card; 35Mb HD space (floppy version); 4Mb RAM. VGA version: 386-25Mhz. Supports: SoundBlaster.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Beautiful. The most impressive in a beat'em-up ever.

Sound
+ A wide array of Sound FX, and there's the Brian May sound track.

Playability
+ Contra the sceptics, this game is extraordinarily playable.

SUMMARY

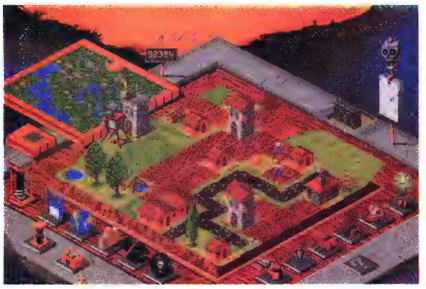
Mirage have done the impossible producing a game that'll survive its own hype. A brilliant product, a brilliant effort – just brilliant – if you like beat'em-ups.

ninety-three percent

Ultimate Domain

Kirsten Foster never knew town planning was such an exciting, cut-throat business. Then she played *Ultimate Domain*.

Clockwise from the top: sell produce to the talking shopkeeper; the temple – offer money to raise morale; the tavern – talk to travellers about the jewels; the main screen; your balance chart – gives info on your land and your needs; the warehouse – if you haven't got one, your production is wasted!



Ultimate Domain was first released on floppy earlier this year, though its name was changed to *Genesia* for the British market. Now it has been released on CD-ROM under its original title of *Ultimate Domain*. Confused? Well *Ultimate Domain* is a strategy-god-sim-cum-RPG with full speech and 3-D rendered animated cut sequences. Clearer now?

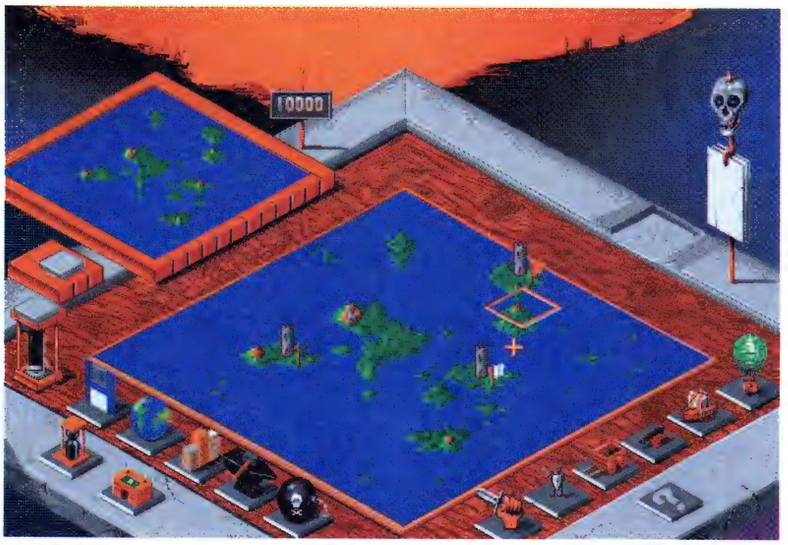
This strategy-god-sim is played against the background of an RPG/adventure style story of love-lorn kings and magical jewels. Whilst building up and sustaining a thriving community, *Sim City*-style, you have to establish international relations and fight off marauding invaders. You also need to search for and recover seven magical jewels to restore peace and harmony to the land of Genesia. All this must be attempted in competition with two other settlers (human or computer opponents), who will be doing their best to prevent your victory.

Ravaged

Sound tough? Well, yes, it is. There's a lot to think about, but Microids have made this game as user-friendly as possible, offering a Quick-Start and strategy guide in the manual which will get you through those early years without too much trouble. Of course, if life was too easy it would be boring, so there are still plenty of opportunities for disaster awaiting the settler. Your settlers can be ravaged by disease, your lands can be invaded or your settlement can run out of raw materials or food, but usually only through mismanagement.

Actually, once you've got the hang of allocating your settlers to the right professions in

The 'Build' chart shows what resources you need to build an item and how much it costs.



Right: Click on buildings such as the temple, tavern, barracks and workshop and you can enter them. You are first shown an animated sequence, then you will be able to talk to the relevant person (priest, inventor, tax collector etc.) to gain info or give orders (e.g. invent something, raise taxes etc.)

"While it won't blow the minds of the world's great strategists, you'll easily get sucked into your own little world of Genesia within minutes of sticking in the CD."

the right seasons, you will be pretty safe from drought, starvation or deprivation of any kind. At this point, the game becomes a matter of going though the motions, season by season. That's where the extra RPG-style ingredients add extra spice. The search for the seven Jewels of Neort means you have to consider which inventions are most urgently needed for defence, attack and exploration and how to deploy your troops as well as using your wiles to discover where the jewels are actually hidden.

Class system

Ultimate Domain is a long investment in patience and careful thought which will eventually pay off. In the meantime, players are rewarded with interest in the form of 3-D, animated cut sequences which have a kind of 'medieval-Trumpton' look and feel, but which are accompanied by some of the most delicately composed music I've ever heard in a game, such as the reverberating, mystical chants in the temple scenes. In-game sound effects are a little dodgy and are guaranteed to drive everyone around you insane with their looped 'howling dog' and 'chirping bird' effects. The graphics offer admirable detail at such a small scale. Each settler is represented individually on the land map, slogging away at whatever they do, chopping wood, sowing wheat, building a house etc. Click on them and they'll give a little speech telling you what they do and whether they're happy and healthy. (Disturbingly, all the architects and inventors speak very plummily, and the farmers and woodcutters speak in variations of Eliza Doolittle's Cock-er-ney!)

Ultimate Domain is one of the most visually and aurally pleasing games of its type. Though it encompasses a variety of gameplaying styles, each one is a little watered down in the combination process. This is not one of the most complex strategy sims around. You decide if that's a good or bad thing. The twin aims of capturing all the jewels and vanquishing your rivals are not easily achieved and can be further complicated by altering the difficulty level and the setting of the game. There are five worlds to choose from, each with its own map and strategy. *Ultimate Domain* has a very individual and appealing look and feel and, while it won't blow the minds of the world's great strategists, you'll easily get sucked into your own little world of Genesia within minutes of sticking in the CD.

● KIRSTEN FOSTER

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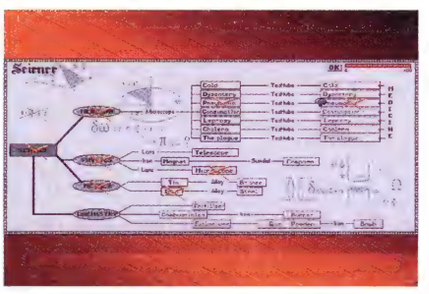
Click on an item on the invention chart and your inventors will, eventually, discover it.



PC POWER RECOMMENDED — THE COMPLETE PC ENTERTAINMENT PACKAGE

FULL POWER

Ultimate Domain CD
Publisher: Mindscape
Contact: 0444-246-333
Developer: Microids
Price £39.99

REQUIREMENTS

386; MS-DOS 5.0 or above; 6Mb hard disk space; 560K conventional memory; 2Mb EMS; mouse.
Supports: SoundBlaster and compatibles.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Beautiful animations, cute details.
– Portraits of characters repeated.

Sound
+ Wonderful, evocative music.
– FX make a padded cell appealing.

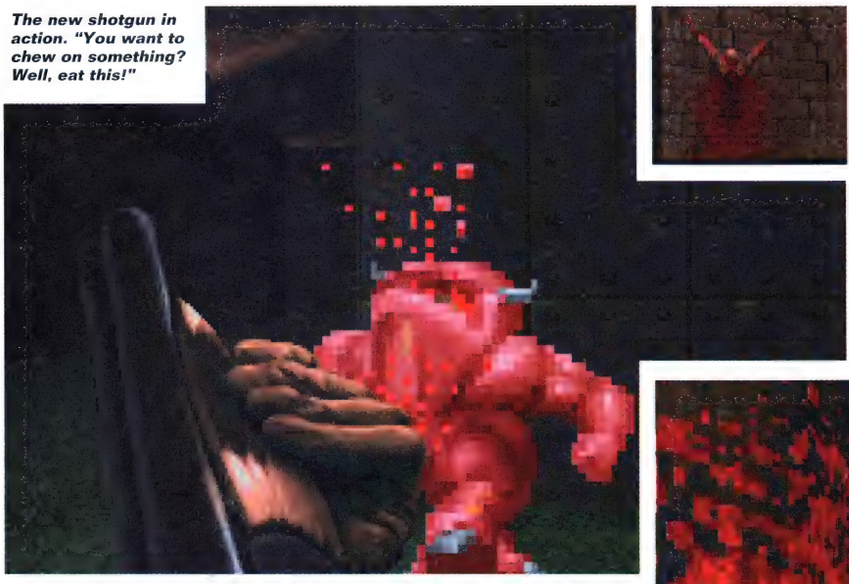
Playability
+ User-over-friendly, engrossing.
– Early years are a bit of a drudge.

SUMMARY

Will have wide appeal. Human opponents greatly increase playability. Familiar enough to be comfortable, different enough to be interesting.

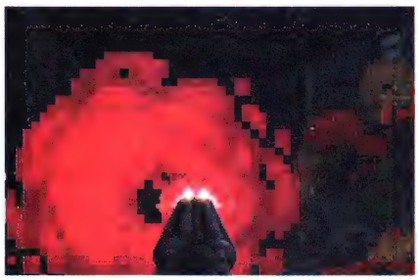
eighty-eight percent

Doom II



The new shotgun in action. "You want to chew on something? Well, eat this!"

PC Power were the first with exclusive news on it, now we bring you the final product. Dino Boni shuts himself in a darkened room, lights a few candles and sits down to try out the most eagerly awaited game of 1994; *Doom II*.



Right: Skeletons with rocket launchers? You would've thought that the demonic Powers That Be could've given them something a little bit better. Oh, I forgot to mention that the missiles can home in on you. Left and below: TOTAL CARNAGE!

I can still remember the first time I played *Doom*. It was a cold, wet night and nothing was on TV, when the phone rang. "Dino," said a far away voice, "I've got something you just have to see. Get your butt over here right now!"

As I jumped in my car, I remember thinking my friend had re-discovered the ups of chemical living, but nevertheless I drove the few miles to his house. He was waiting for me in the doorway. I didn't even have time to utter the obligatory "Awight!" before I was dragged into his bedroom. Needless to say, I started to think he'd gone raving mad when I saw the state of his bedroom; cardboard fast-food cartons, dirty clothes and empty coffee cups littered the floor and the curtains were drawn tight. "What's going on?" I asked.

"Watch this!" he replied and then subjected me to my first taste of *Doom*. No game ever produced came even close to its sheer appeal, and I enjoyed the next few months happily blasting every demon who was stupid enough to stick his red eyes in my way. But as the moons passed, the fever began to wear off; even a dose of constructing levels could not bring back the rush that I felt for those first few games. The romance had gone out of the relationship, and *Doom* was relegated to sitting on my hard drive and being booted up when I had a few minutes to kill before doing something worthwhile.

Now that *Doom II: Hell on Earth* is lurking in my desk drawer, I am a happy man again. The bloodlust has returned, and I am having to physically restrain myself from playing the game to write this review. Yep, it's that good.

Just in case you've had your head stuck in a hole for the past few months, *Doom II* carries on where the last game left off. After you defeated the spawning masses on Phobos, a portal opened up and you stepped through. You emerged on

Above: A Spider Demon gets squashed on the aptly-named 'Crusher' level.
Above Right: These guys were named "The Chaingun Dudes" by Jay Wilbur, Biz and all-round nice guy at iD software.
Right: Fat, bulbous and mean. No, it's not John Goodman, but another of the new monsters only found in Doom II. This guy has flamethrowers in place of his hands and moves very quickly, given his large size. Thankfully, he's pretty easy to kill.

"Every level is bigger and tougher than the original. Danger not only lurks around every corner in *Doom II*, it sports a big cheesy grin and carries a large lead bar."

Earth, amongst green fields, tweeting birds and fluffy bunny rabbits. "Phew," you thought, "good job none of those demons followed me through the portal, eh?" Well, they did, and before you know it, Earth's cities are a maze of burning concrete and decapitated rabbits with their heads on spikes. You haven't even got time to pause for a coffee; mankind needs your help and you are the only one who is brave (or is that stupid?) enough to get rid of the demons once again.

The game comes on five HD disks; a good sign, seeing as the original *Doom* came on only four. After a trouble-free install, I ran the game and was greeted by a stunning intro screen showing a Cyberdemon trying to perform an emergency heart operation on your good self using high explosive rockets. The menu system for the game is the same as in *Doom*, bar the lack of episodes. This game is one massive episode, comprising of around 40 levels. The difficulty levels are still the same, although there are a few new command line switches that can make a big difference to the game.

Big, tough and cheesy

Okay, the game's loaded and you're on the first level. Oh. Everything looks the same. The control panel, screen layout and graphics are the same. Oh dear, I think I am about to become very disappointed. But a quick look at the map confirms all that I have fervently hoped for all these months; every level is much bigger and tougher. Danger not only lurks around every corner in *Doom II*, it sports a big cheesy grin and carries a large lead bar.

The first level of *Doom II* is very small. The game designers reckon a par time is around 30 seconds, but if you explore a little bit, you'll find all the secret rooms. Yep, the developers have excelled themselves yet again and have produced levels that better the original game by miles. They are a lot harder, though and it will take a much bigger slice of your life before you get anywhere in the game.

Doom II has some little tweaks that are meant to increase the gameplay. The command-line options now include a Turbo function, allowing you (or the monsters in the game) to move much faster. I can understand why you may want to move faster, but the monsters? The game is hard enough as it is. This Turbo mode can also be used in head-to-head Death Match games but your opponent will be informed of your speed increase. The text that comes with the game says "This is because it is considered cheating." Do I look like I give a damn?

The weapons are much more accessible in *Doom II* and, unlike the original game, you can pick up some of the more powerful weapons on the first few levels. You're going to need them, too, because the action gets very hairy from now on. One disappointing aspect of the game is the lack of new weapons; all you get is a new, double-barrelled shotgun. This awesome weapon

Left: These mini Spider Demons are more of a pain in the rear end than anything else.
Above: This demon can resurrect dead monsters. He also sets you alight with a magical fire attack.

Insert: The title screen we've all been waiting for these past few months. Main: Another of those pesky skeletons tries to whack you around the face. The God Mode cheat was used for screen capture purposes only, I promise!

The last level! Not as easy as it looks, I can tell you! That goat's skull on the wall has a nasty habit of shooting small cubes which turn into monsters. In no time at all, you are joined by the entire cast of the game, and they're not too pleased!

can kill three or four Sergeants at a time, but is very slow to reload. Now you have eight weapons in the game, but why didn't iD include some more? Lack of space will probably be the scapegoat, but the amount of people who will believe this is probably smaller than Dave's IQ.

As the game is set on Earth, you would imagine that most of the action would take place outdoors – wrong. Most of it is in closed buildings such as the Power Plant, but persevere, and you'll find yourself out in the streets accompanied by some pretty stunning background artwork. This depicts a ruined city in flames, and really sets the scene for the game. Before this, *Doom II* looked like just a collection of new levels for the original game.

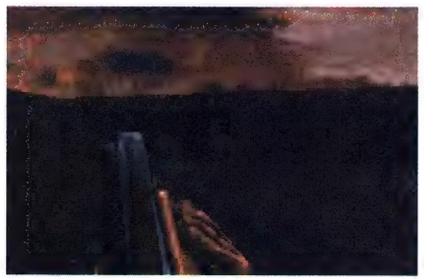
A few characters (together with their scenery) have migrated from iD's other games to *Doom II*. One of the levels is a massive hangar filled with the SS guards from *Wolfenstein 3D*. They even scream in German when you shoot them! The other new monsters give their maiden performance later on in the game, and boy are they tough! Their firepower has been greatly increased, and some of them are just plain nasty. Skeletons with shoulder-mounted missile launchers, fat gits with flame-throwers and even mini Spider Demons with particle cannons all make your life a misery.

I must mention one great disappointment in *Doom II*. The old cheat codes still work, ruining the game (if you are inclined to use them) right from the start. Surely a change in this area should have been a necessity? With any luck, the version that hits the shelves will force you to play the game as normal for a good few months before the codes are leaked to the press.

The little tweaks that made *Doom* a truly great game have all but disappeared from *Doom II*. The maps that were displayed after each level have gone, only to be replaced by a Giger-type backdrop. The lack of episodes completely throws any *Doom* Editor, so until some bright spark comes up with a new version, you're stuck with what you've got. No doubt it won't be long before BBSs around the country are filled with extra levels and strange new sound add-ons.

So, what do I think of *Doom II*? It's a worthy successor to the first game, but it could've been so much better. New monsters and one new weapon really isn't enough to justify a new game. True, you do get the new set of levels, but it would've been great to see more new death-dealers plastered around the game. Some of the new monsters are great to look at (as are all the graphics) and the sound has been tweaked a little bit to include the new monster sounds and effects. Apart from this, you get the feeling that *Doom II* is just a harder version of *Doom* with just a few new bolt-ons. Don't get me wrong, it's still a great game and one well worth getting. I just can help the slight feeling of disappointment that is seeping through my mind. Maybe I'll have to wait another year until I get that massive adrenaline rush again.

● **DINO BONI**



Above Top: This level looks and plays like one of those fairground shooting galleries. Trouble is that you rarely see a shooting gallery using a twelve-gauge sawn-off shotgun!
Above: The end-of-level screen is missing the beautiful map from the first game.

FULL POWER

Doom II
Publisher: Virgin
Contact: 081-960-2255
Developer: iD Software
Price: £44.99

REQUIREMENTS

386DX-40 (486DX recommended); 4Mb RAM; VGA; hard disk.
Supports: All major sound cards; mouse; joystick; modem, network, serial lead play.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Great new monsters and backdrops.
– But the rest are repeats.

Sound
+ Screams, roars and bubbling death sounds aplenty.

Playability
+ Just as absorbing as the first game.
– Can get very difficult in places.

SUMMARY

A worthy successor to *Doom* that is let down only by the lack of new features. But it is still fast, violent and action-packed all the way through.

ninety-one percent

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Screen shot of WORLD CIRCUIT ™ by MicroProse

Dreamweb

Kirsten Foster reviews the '18' rated, sex and violence-filled adventure from Empire. Please don't tell her mother.

Dreamweb reminds me of a scene I saw in a film where a guy is put through an American Indian initiation test. He's strung up by hooks pierced through his skin. That's what this game does. It hooks you and drags you in, you're really grabbed by the story and characters, then it twists your head in circles, causing you immense pain. Mind you, according to Joanna Lumley's yoghurt-based law of polarity everything has contrasts, and *Dreamweb* offers pleasure as well as pain.

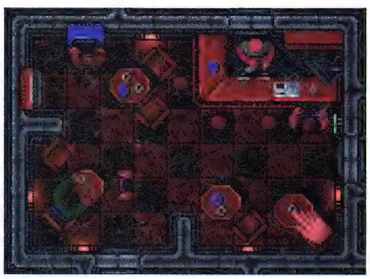
Dreams and misdemeanours

The backbone of the game is its carefully woven storyline, which you first come across in a madly scrawled diary packaged with the game. This is the diary of the lead character, Ryan, describing his thoughts and actions up to the time the game begins. This diary is full of clues to the game and helps build up atmosphere and character profiles.

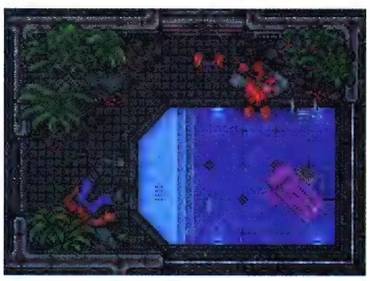
The actual story goes something like this: All the world's dreamers enter the Dreamweb, the connection of all the dreamers' subconsciouses. The Dreamweb controls the very heart of civilisation. The web is in turn controlled by seven people who each have one of the seven 'nodes' of the web inside them. Their strengths and weaknesses, feelings and characters affect the whole of the web and so, the world. When a node-holder dies the node is transferred to another human, so allowing the forces in the web to constantly change aspect. But evil forces have taken it over, and have managed to put all seven nodes in the control of evil people. As Ryan, you are directed by the Keepers of the web, through terrible, seemingly crazy dreams, to find and kill these seven node-holders. After each killing you are transported to the web where the Keepers direct you to your next victim. You will also get clues in the game itself as to who and where

If you die, the screen below really rubs salt into your many wounds. It's all your fault!

Locations

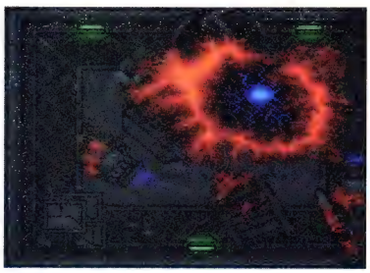


Sparky's Bar: This is where you *used* to work. You get sacked at the start of the game! At least you get your money.



Quick thinking and clicking is needed to kill and not be killed in this scene. You only murder in a good cause, of course.

Your girlfriend's flat. It's a damn sight tidier than your dump. Don't leave here without searching the kitchen area.



One of your victims tries to escape in his personal plane. He doesn't get far. Things aren't so easy from now on.

Below: The inventory is easy to use – just click and drag. There are only 30 spaces for objects, though, and some of these are taken by your clothes! Left: You take a victim by surprise! The red and blue squares in the top right corner show your progress.

these victims are, as well as clues from the diary.

The general feel of the story is the hackneyed but popular vision of a futuristic, dull, grey, anonymous cityscape, where it always seems to be raining. The screens consist of an overhead, very small view of the scene. This means that there are no blind corners, as in other games, but it also creates problems. As the screen is so small, details are very hard to see and you have to be really accurate with the cursor, even when you're just entering and leaving screens. The mouse cursor does act as a magnifier, with a small zoom screen at the corner of the picture, but it's not much use if you don't know where to stick it! This is a big problem, as you really need to search every room for clues and useful objects. You can examine almost everything in a screen, but only a few things will be useful. The skill is in deciding what to carry in your limited inventory. You're also limited in what you can do with objects once you've got them. The verb 'use' covers all possible actions, which stops you faffing about, but does make you feel restricted.

Small screen

With such a tiny screen and limited graphics to work with, Creative Reality have still managed to imbue each screen with loads of atmosphere. Animations of the tiny characters bring them to life surprisingly effectively, and a fuller picture is painted with well-produced effects and music and digitised speech (CD-only). The game is

Above: Click on the picture of Ryan to open the inventory. Poky bathroom isn't it!?

perked up even more by loads of gory violence, with limbs littering the floor, and even full-frontal, male(!) nudity in some rather explicit (but small-scale) sex-scenes.

At first, the game moves pretty quickly, especially if you've got adventure-gaming experience. I despatched my first few victims pretty easily. In fact things were sometimes too easy. I spent ages trying to get past a security guard through various underhand and convoluted ways, when all I needed to do was blast his face off with my gun. Quite a few puzzles were this deceptively straightforward, but then the odd twister popped up which had me tearing my hair out. Solutions ranged from the obvious to the obscure with little in the middle-ground. The game is necessarily linear, as you are following a linear storyline – knocking off a succession of victims. I did feel very led, with each clue pushing me a step further in the required direction, as if I was following an unravelling string. This keeps the game moving at a fast pace.

Although I found the structure of the puzzles disappointing, and some aspects of the interface are awkward, I still got very involved in this game. It's interesting to find that a game with some fairly basic graphics can still evoke a player's imagination and emotions. In fact, this game probably comes closer to interactive movie-dom than many other, FMV-heavy adventures. Use your imagination and play it for the plot, not the puzzles.

● **KIRSTEN FOSTER**

"Even with a tiny screen and limited graphics, Creative Reality manage to imbue each screeen with loads of atmosphere."

These network screens are throughout the game and give useful info and clues.

FULL POWER

Dreamweb
Publisher: Empire
Contact: 081-343-7337
Developer: Creative Reality
Price: £39.99

REQUIREMENTS

386; MS-DOS 3.0; 590K base memory;
25Mb HD space;
keyboard; mouse.
Supports: SoundBlaster sound card.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Lots of gore and good animations.
– Details too small. Looks dated.

Sound
+ Great FX and thumping soundtrack.
– Needs more variety, perhaps.

Playability
+ Good plot and (mostly) easy interface.
– Fluctuating difficulty level. Linear.

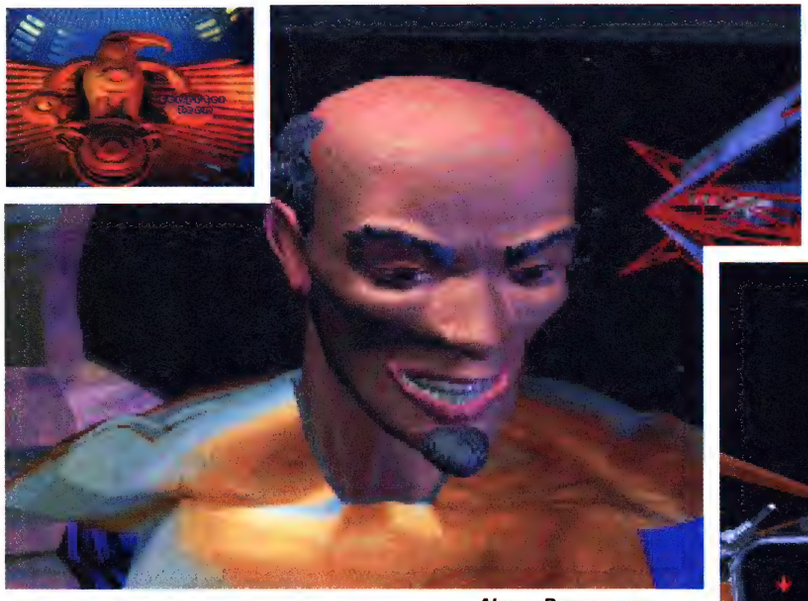
SUMMARY

This game is enjoyable but flawed. Many players may find it too restricting and linear. It's rescued by an involving plot and evocative atmosphere.

eighty percent

Star Crusader

Take 2 show that history does repeat itself, in a game inspired by the imperial urges of crusaders of old. Become a space invader in this space flight sim with a difference.



Above: Power-crazy Commander Ferrand in the CD's animated intro. Nice goatee!

The main cockpit view. The gauges monitor fuel (F), throttle (T), engine power (E), laser strength (L), desired and actual speed. The cross-hairs are used for steering and aiming. The red optimum trajectory targeting circle marks your target when it is within your range. The monitors are in default settings:- Left: ship's radar – shows icons representing craft detected by radar. If an icon is positioned in the cross hairs, it is directly in front of you; Middle – targeting sight. Displays the target's ID and distance away. The crosshairs illuminate to help you steer towards your target, represented by the orange blob; Right – ship's damage. Details damaged systems. Green = light, Yellow = moderate, Red = severe damage.

Star Crusader stands out from the crowd of 'bugger 'em and blast 'em' space-flight combat sims with its combination of intriguing storyline, clear characterisation and a sense of morality. Developers, Take 2, have been inspired by the history of crusaders and conquerors from the Roman Emperors to Medieval Crusaders, to the builders of the 19th Century's European Empires.

You play Roman Alexandria, a Gorene Wing Commander of the elite Gold Squadron. The Gorenes have spread their influence throughout the known universe, sometimes with little resistance, at other times through bloody battles. However, the Gorenes have always been victorious – until now. Now they face resistance from the alien races of the Ascalon Rift, a newly discovered backwater of space. These races – the powerful, advanced Tancreds; the fanatically religious Zemuns; the chameleon-like Mazumas; the isolationist Amiens, plagued by an insanity-enducing bacteria; and the Nuubyans, embittered refugees – are joined in an uneasy alliance against the invading Gorenes. You are sent out on various missions against the aliens by power-crazed leaders. You will have to choose between following your mad, fascist leaders or joining the brave resistance forces of your alien enemies.

The game opens with a beautifully animated intro, (CD only) with graphics that are not technologically groundbreaking, but are certainly atmospheric and effective.The graphics are accompanied by digitised speech voiceovers and character dialogue, which is decently acted in a generic sci-fi style.

Missions

The main body of the game consists of missions, which are presented to you in mission briefings. There are, supposedly, over 104 gaming missions (I haven't found them all, yet) leading in different directions. This adds longevity of appeal and means you have to lose some battles to play all of the missions. Although the overall war strategy is decided for you by the power mad loonies that

Ship Shapes

View all the ships in the flight simulator. You can view their stats and adjust their ability levels.

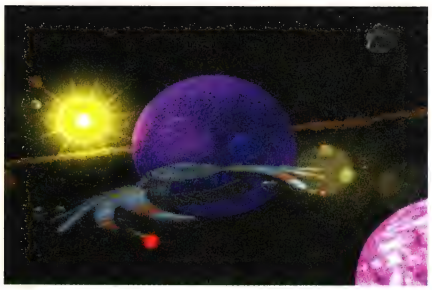
Your fighter, the Scorpion.

The Tancred's Samurai ship.

The Zemun fighter, Harbinger.

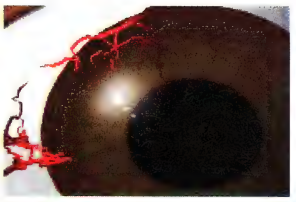
The Mazuman's Buccaneer.

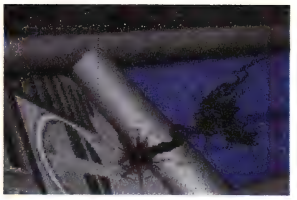
Below: The animated intro tells the history of the expansion of the Gorene Empire.

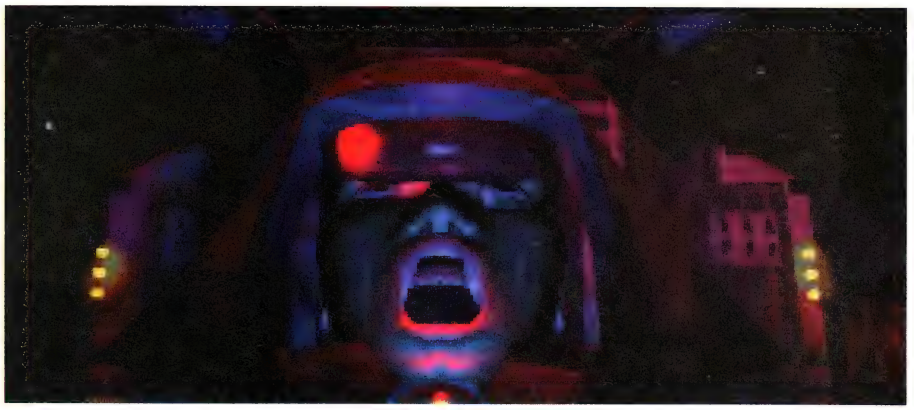


You're dead

Death sequence. Watch your ship and your head explode in the lonely vacuum of space.







"The evolving plot reveals a story of betrayal, suspicion, moral dilemmas and mixed emotions."

command you, you still have to use your strategic skills in flight. Each race's vessels have differing characteristics which determine your tactics in battle. For example, Tancred ships are durable but slow to manoeuvre, so you need to stick close, and Zemun ships are underpowered, so rapid repeat attacks will bring them down easily. The abilities of your own vessel also affects your fighting style. With all these variables, it's a good idea to practise flights in the game's simulator section before flying missions for real. As alien ships may be captured in battle and used in missions, you'll need to know how to handle a huge range of vessels. Don't worry, all the information and tips you need are either in the game or the manual.

The in-battle screen offers 10 views, including internal and external views from various angles. All the screens are clear and easy to use and the controls are quickly picked up after a little practise. In combat, the ship is steered with the mouse or joystick, shooting with mouse or joystick buttons, with speed controlled through the keyboard. You have a lot of control over your vessel, with the shields, weapons, surveillance, power and repair systems all under your control, and you can communicate with friends and foe.

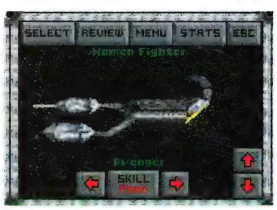
The heat of battle can be confusing, but exciting, as fighters shoot overhead and space is illuminated with laser fire and exploding ships. The only way to keep track of what's happening is through your monitor functions. There is a learning curve to the missions, and you'll have to replay some a few times, but the beauty of this game is that there is more to it than simply blasting everything into oblivion. Losing battles opens up new plotlines, only death leads to a 'dead' end, so remember your ejection seat.

When you reach Section Commander status, you have to select wingmen and combat resources and assign pilots to ships and secondary missions or to the pilot's academy. This game grows with you. When blasting is no longer enough to keep you occupied, greater strategic thinking comes into play. As you improve, you can aim to win a series of medals which are awarded for specific aims, such as destroying enemy vessels in a damaged ship. This gives you another target to aim for if the going gets too easy.

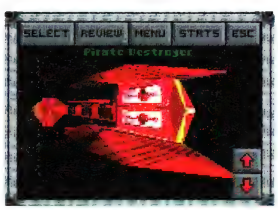
Most of the atmosphere of tension and excitement in the game comes from the speech, an enjoyable (if slightly corny) script, the distinct and clashing personalities of the game's characters and the evolving plot which reveals sub-plots and entwined storylines covering betrayal, suspicion, moral dilemmas and mixed emotions. *Star Crusader* may not have the 'wow factor' graphics of games from more prestigious stables, but it offers a freshness and user-friendliness which will make it an attractive buy for a wide range of gamers, including those new to this genre.

● **KIRSTEN FOSTER**

The Amien's Starwolf ship.



The Nomen's vicious Avenger.



The Pirate fighter vessel.

FULL POWER

Star Crusader CD
Publisher: Gametek
Contact: 0753-553-445
Developer: Take2
Price: £39.99

REQUIREMENTS

386SX; 2Mb RAM; 768K EMS; 525K conventional memory; DOS 5.0; mouse; keyboard.
Supports: All major sound cards; joystick.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Stylish 3-D animated intro.
– Battle screens confusing.

Sound
+ FX well synched. Atmospheric music.
– Repetitive soundtrack.

Playability
+ Multi-faceted story and gameplay.
Versatile to suit beginner and veteran.

SUMMARY

An effective mix of strategy and arcade action held back by unspectacular graphics and sound, in a highly competitive genre.

eighty-one percent

Inferno

Inferno is one of the year's most eagerly awaited games. Dino Boni lifts the lid off this CD smash from Ocean, and delves deep inside.

Inferno is the 'kind-of' sequel to the ill-fated *Epic*. This game was supposed to bring unparalleled gameplay and graphics to the barren PC games world. Within a few days of release, everyone and their kid sister had played it. And hated it.

But DID have been putting sweat and blood into their new product in order to impress and astound us. *Inferno* adds a new twist to the storyline, but nevertheless stays with the battle between humanity and the evil Raxxons.

After their bitter defeat in *Epic*, the Raxxons are hungry for victory. But humanity has the greatest warrior in the galaxy and, to all intents and purposes, he is invulnerable. In a brief spell of ingenuity, the Raxxons capture him with the hope of turning him into one of them, via a quick spell in the Morph Chamber. This device alters a being's molecular structure into whatever the user wishes, and in the case of our luckless hero, he's destined to become a green, fanged version of Arnie.

Of course, our hero isn't going to take all this lying down, and promptly escapes before the morph process can be completed. Upon his return to Terra Nova, it is discovered that his form has been altered, but with a bonus. He is now the only being able to survive the newly developed Matter Transporter, enabling him to be beamed out of a doomed spacecraft before death. The only downside is that this can only happen twice which, translated into game-speak, means that you only have three lives in the game, as this hero becomes your silicon alter-ego.

Gripe number one

The install routine copies a few essential files to your hard disk (which is usual for most CD-ROM games) and then you have to go through the obligatory sound set-up selections. These are quite painless compared to some of the atrocities that I've encountered, but a nasty shock hit me when I tried to set up the CD audio. The game requires a thing called a 'Swap File'. This is an area of your hard disk that it uses to store the CD audio and animation data prior to play. To hear the CD audio, you need at least a 10Mb file. For a real smooth ride, a 50Mb file is recommended.

Now I know these files are needed because you can't play CD-audio and read data at the same time, but I can't condone chopping off 50Mb of my hard disk for one game when it's supposed to be on CD. No doubt the guys at DID will read this and start muttering "Well, I'd like to see him do better!". Well, I can't, but at the end of the day, we're the guys who have to fork out for your product, only to find that we need a massive chunk of hard disk space to run it with CD audio. I bottled it, and stuck with the SoundBlaster music. It's nowhere near as good, but my hard disk is feeling a lot better now.

Upon loading, you're treated to another 3D Studio intro, interspersed with sampled speech from the main characters. In the case of the Raxxons, the speech turns into sampled grunts, but the game does print up subtitles just in case you can't speak Raxxon. The intro tells the tale of your escape from the Morph Chamber, and your subsequent return to the battle.

Gripe number two

The game can be played in three different ways. Arcade mode supposedly puts you straight into the action, according to the manual. Erm, I beg to differ guys, it doesn't. You still have to go through the rendered 'conversation' between yourself and your commander before you even get to the game. Deft use of the Escape key speeds things up, but it shouldn't be needed in the first place.

The Director's Cut option allows you to play a full-blown game, but the events and missions are determined by your own actions. Failing a mission in *Inferno* doesn't necessarily mean the end of the game, because you may have done enough to stave off the attack until the next time. The last option is the Evolutionary mode. In this option, you choose where to attack the Raxxons and how to direct the battles. If you don't choose well, though, the war will be lost as the Raxxons enslave other parts of the galaxy while you are out chasing dreams of grandeur.

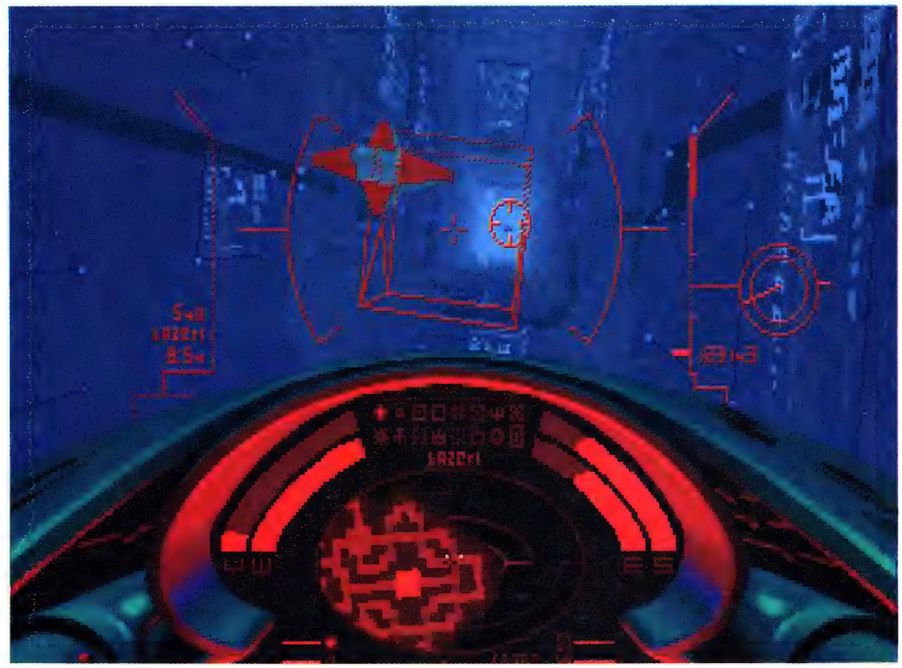
No matter what type of game you play, you must sit through a mission 'briefing'. This is a sequence of short animations spliced with speech. After you've read it all (or have cut through it with the Escape key), you have to wait quite a considerable amount of time before the game begins. This is the same throughout the game and every time you make a transition from space to another environment, be it a ship, satellite or planet, you have to sit back and wait. Not the most pleasing of features, I assure you.

Once in space, however, the game begins to warm up. You are shown an outside view of the Inferno ship before you are transported inside. The cockpit is a beautiful piece of artwork, covered in meaningful symbols and icons, plus a scanner that looks like it has been ripped straight out of Elite. The game is designed to be played with the mouse and the keyboard at the same time, and this takes quite a long time to get used to. The program uses a very high sensitivity level for the mouse and this is very off-putting at first, as you tend to over-compensate. A little practise is all that is needed.

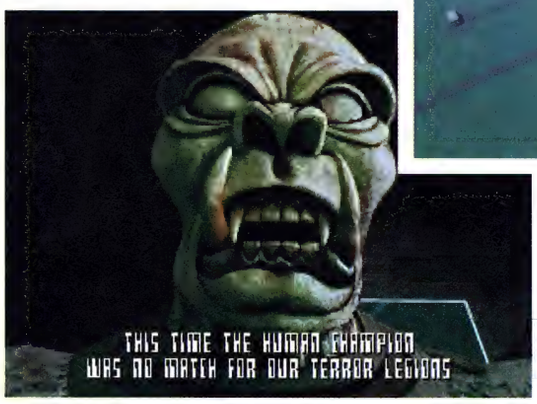
The buttons on the mouse control your speed, while all the other functions are controlled via the keyboard. A few pushes of the left mouse button edges your craft out of the base and, before you know it, you are in free flight. This is the perfect time to check out the outside views, and there are quite a few of them. The standard chase view is available, along with a fly-by and lock view. The game also supports a 'Virtual Cockpit'. This allows you to move your view around while keeping the ship pointed in the same direction a la *Overlord*. The second virtual cockpit view locks onto a target, and follows it around. This is very confusing as the ship moves so fast, so it's not really useful for anything except to impress your MegaDrive-owning friends.

Back inside the cockpit, a shrill beep

Inferno uses a blend of pre-rendered 3D Studio animations and shaded vector graphics. The animations are slick and definitely tongue-in-cheek, taking the Mickey out of every boyhood hero there ever was.



Top left: A page from the Inferno comic, which tells the tale of your capture and subsequent escape from the Morph Chamber.
Above: Flying through a ship is not for the faint hearted. Quick reflexes are needed and it's all too easy to get lost in the maze of tunnels that make up the superstructure.



Above: The base on Terra Nova is the same as the 3-D model that appears in the game.
Right: Docking with a Defcorp installation to protect it from invaders.
Left: Nice looking chaps, aren't they?

"The planetary missions are by far the best. Shooting across the surface of a planet, or even under the sea, gives a fantastic illusion of speed."

signals the presence of an enemy fighter. In the middle of the head-up display is a 3-D grid. This is supposed to represent the area around your ship, and allows you to find enemy ships easily. I, however, found it to be next to useless. The best way to find ships is to use the *Elite*-clone scanner. The head-up display also shows the general direction in which you have to travel, relative to your own ship, to intercept the enemy. Alternatively, you can cop out and use one of the Autopilot options. These are available at anytime except when you are inside a ship or satellite. AutoNav 1 allows automatic docking with ships, satellites or bases while AutoNav 3 will fly you to a specified way-point on the map. AutoNav 2, however, is a combat autopilot which manoeuvres you behind the currently selected target. All you have to do is push the fire button. You score less points for killing a ship using this option, but this didn't stop me from using it on more than one occasion.

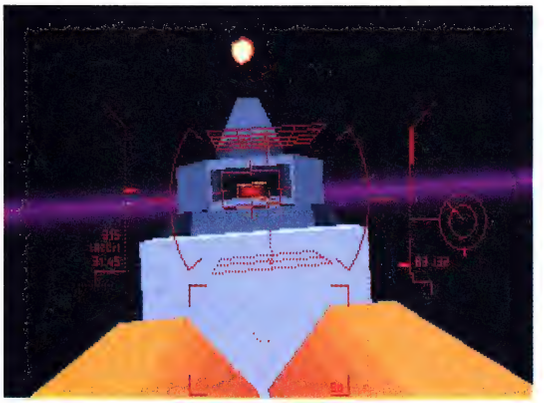
Combat is where the sheen of *Inferno* starts to break down. The enemy ships aren't too intelligent. They simply fly around, just waiting to be shot. As you progress further into the game, they do become more aggressive, but a quick torpedo is all that is needed to kill them off forever. You have an ample supply of weapons with which to kill these pesky creatures, and all of them have a certain use. You have three different types of laser, three different types of homing torpedo and a gun called the Megadeath cannon. Not surprisingly, this is the most powerful weapon in your arsenal, but it requires a lot of energy.

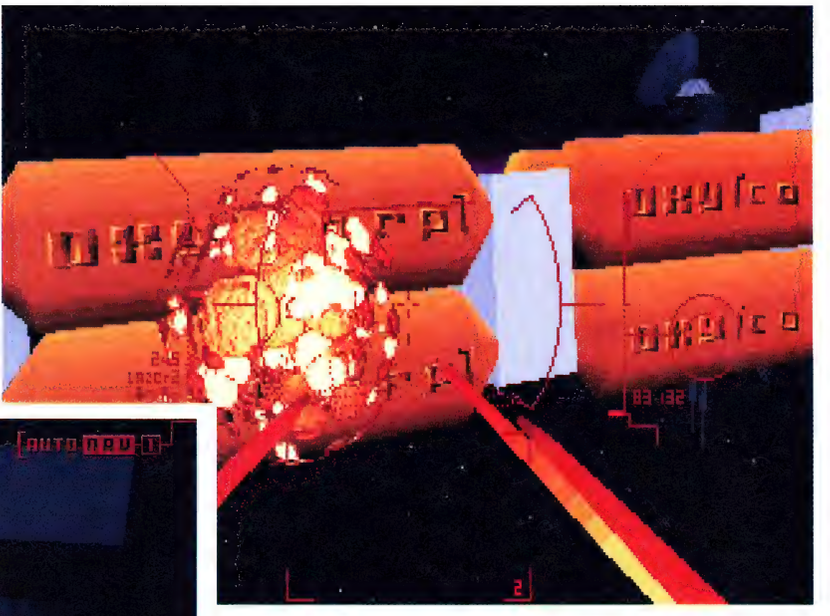
Extra energy, shields and weapon supplies can be picked up from combat pods, which are found floating in space around the mission area. These pods contain useful supplies and can be picked up by either flying through them or by pressing the 'P' key on the keyboard when they are close. Once you have picked them up, their contents are automatically added to your weapons or energy banks. This is the only way that you can re-arm or re-fuel during a mission, so supplies have to be used wisely, especially on some of the longer missions.

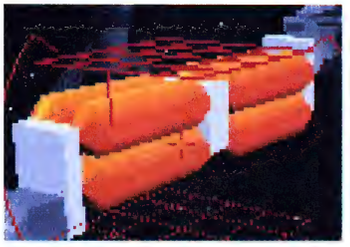
You can enter some of the ships and satellites that are spread around the missions, either to defend or destroy them. Once you are inside, the Nav computer changes to show a map of the internal structure of the ship, which is made out of corridors. These provide links between the rooms that contain the vital parts of the ship. Flying down these tunnels is difficult enough in itself; fighting battles in them I found to be pretty much impossible.

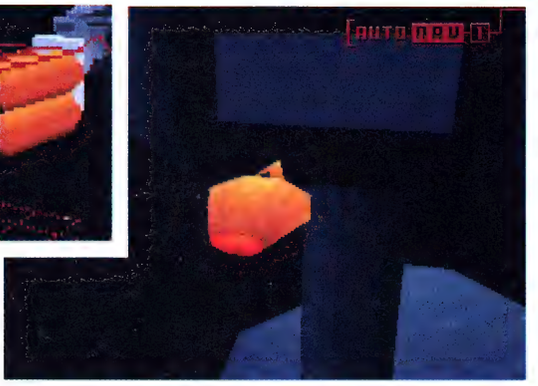
The planetary missions are by far the best in the game. Shooting across the surface of a planet, or even under the sea, gives a fantastic illusion of speed. The outside views offer a stunning picture of your ships, and some nice touches have been included by the programmers for this part of the game. When you enter the water (even at speed), bubbles form all around your ship as it retracts its 'wings'. The sea-bed is simple yet effective (as are all the planetary objects) but this is one of the best graphical features of the game. The spaceships and satellites are all made up of shaded polygons, while the asteroids are bit-mapped. They all move at a surprising speed, but the final playability of this game rests on the ability of your PC and its video card.

The first few missions are quite easy, and incredibly boring. It's only when you have completed a few missions that you start to see the size of the game (there are around 700









The vector graphics may be simple, but they sure are effective. The shading is spot-on and everything moves pretty smoothly.

Above: This is a friendly ship, but I felt like shooting it all the same. Below: Death is not a nice sight in Inferno.

missions in all), but most of these involve the same idea: fly out of your base, go to a point on the map, destroy some ships or enter a ship and then destroy some more ships and then return to base. One or two of the missions go on for ages, so DID have included a Save Game feature that can be activated at any time should you feel the need for sleep.

Gripe number three

The missions may follow much the same theme, but the combat is even more repetitive. The torpedoes are so good at killing ships that you hardly ever have to use your lasers, except when you run out of them. As for the larger motherships, they're like sitting ducks and don't even fire back until much further into the game. The basic essence of the combat is this; you have to fly around in circles (slowly, mind you. Go too fast and you'll overtake your target before you know it) and follow the ships until the torpedoes get a lock. A quick press of the space bar and your target is history, although some of the ships need more than one hit.

There are some good points about *Inferno*, so I guess if this is going to be a balanced review, then I'd better tell you about them as well. The graphics in the game are just superb. The shaded craft look stunning and everything moves around at a fair old rate of knots, even when there are lots of ships in the near vicinity. A fast machine is necessary to run *Inferno* at its full potential, even though the detail can be turned down. A fast video card is also a bonus; you'll notice the difference if you try to run *Inferno* on a 256K board! The intro screens are very well done too, even if you become sick of seeing them after a few games, but these are supposed to provide a bit of light relief after a heavy battle, and they do the job well. Some of the dialogue is very funny, and is constantly taking the Mickey out Dan Dare and other such boyhood heroes.

The sound in the game is another plus side to *Inferno*. The Alien Sex Fiend tracks are very atmospheric and nothing like what I expected them to be.

The problem with *Inferno* is that the combat is too simple and the game itself is repetitive, indeed. Many people may find it very difficult to get into in any significant way. This may be due to the lack of variation in the missions, or it could be just due to plain, old, bad design. At the time of writing, the game is still being tweaked, though, so maybe the programmers will be improving the game before its launch. At the moment, support for the VFX-1 Virtuality helmet is being included, for all those of you who want to spend around £700 on a glorified crash lid. In my opinion, however, *Inferno* needs more than just a few fancy gimmicks to make it a top game. Sad, but true.

● **DINO BONI**

FULL POWER

Inferno
Publisher: Ocean
Contact: 061-832-6633
Developer: DID
Price: £44.99

REQUIREMENTS

386DX; 4Mb RAM; CD-ROM drive; 10Mb hard disk space for CD-Audio; mouse; VGA.
Supports: All major sound cards.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Superb craft, outside views and general all-round presentation.

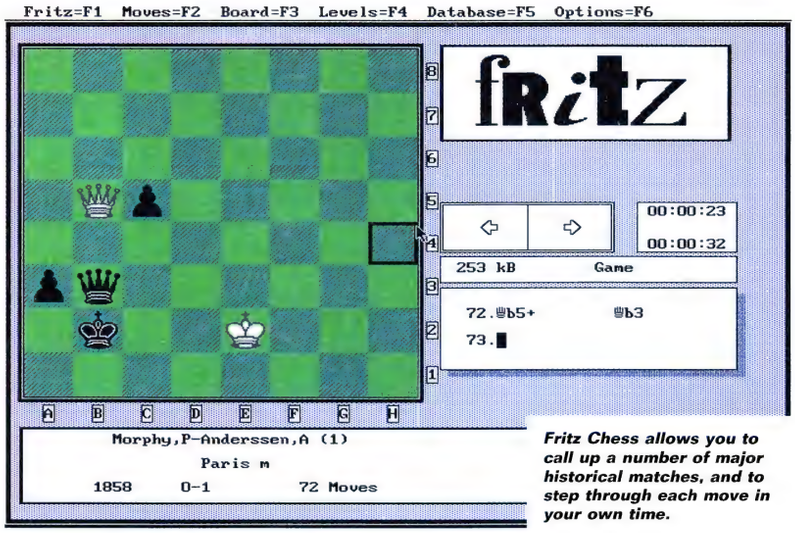
Sound
+ Good FX and great CD music is rare these days. *Inferno* has both.

Playability
– Fun for a few hours, but the novelty soon wears off.

SUMMARY

Once the fever of getting the game home and playing for the first time has worn off, you're left wondering what is so special about *Inferno*.

eighty-three percent



Fritz Chess allows you to call up a number of major historical matches, and to step through each move in your own time.

Fritz Chess

Run this game on a P90 and it'll beat Kasparov. Well, the full version will... Dave Westley lines up his pawns.

Fritz Chess doesn't look much. The solitary 2-D board is not a patch on the stunning SVGA 3-D environment offered by The Software Toolworks' *ChessMaster 4000*. There are no warriors, no samurai, no dinosaurs – not even a solitary stormtrooper prancing about as a pawn. The chess board offered here makes up barely 1/4 of the screen and has a streamlined, ascetic beauty.

Yet *Fritz Chess* doesn't want to bother itself with such superficialities – and earns bonus points in this camp for not doing so. For many, the initial, gaudy charm of *ChessMaster 4000* wore off with the constant irritation of battling with the limitation of RAM in a product that sat clumsily over Windows. After all, the lack of gloss doesn't mean that *Fritz Chess* can't be well designed. At the top of the screen there are easy-to-use drop down menus, accessible either with a mouse, or a function key. Anyone and everyone should be able to work their way around it intuitively.

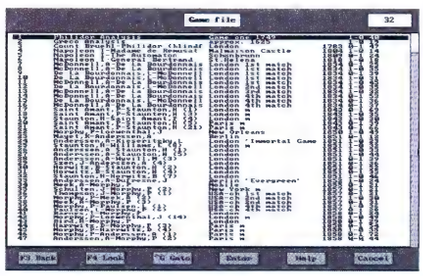
The no-nonsense, shareware-esque front-end does suggest that *Fritz Chess* demands a more serious, chess-literate audience than its *ChessMaster* counterpart, however, and that fact is backed up by the lack of any real tutorials for the complete novice. What the player does get is access to major historical matches, stretching from the 16th Century all the way to the Kasparov and Short contest of '93. You can simply load up a match and move through it, step by step, analysing the moves in your own good time. The player can also access a comprehensive set of opening moves, and even enter his own games, building up an extensive database in the process.

Fritz Chess does appeal to the more serious player then, those who are likely to be involved in regular contests. They, after all, would be the ones who would make most use of the database feature – perhaps even storing the games of their opponents to build up a 'character profile'.

Perhaps it was a mistake to alter this product from the one used by the 'Masters' – this version of *Fritz Chess* is basically a cut-down version of that used by professional players and the full version beat both Kasparov and Short in the Intel Munich World Chess Express Challenge in May of this year. *Fritz Chess* should have left the beginners' market to the likes of *ChessMaster* and just gone for the more advanced market. Experienced players, after all, are the ones who are going to get the most out of this product. Complete beginners are just going to suffer terminal frustration – even with the computer in Handicapped mode.

For those of you who have been waiting for a powerful chess sim, but aren't ever likely to challenge the Kasparovs of this world, *Fritz Chess* is well worth a look. Certainly, the ability to store your own and other people's games is a welcome addition, and the game is beautifully simple to use. Definitely worth a look.

● **DAVID WESTLEY**



The various opening moves you can call up are layers deep, getting more specific as you go.

FULL POWER

Fritz Chess
Publishers: Playtime
Contact: 0274-532-424
Developers: Chessbase GMBH
Price: £39.99

REQUIREMENTS

512Kb base memory; hard disk or floppy drive; keyboard.
Supports: Mouse.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Very plain, but very effective. Simply stylish.

Sound
– I can't remember any except for the odd beep.

Playability
– Lack of tutorials makes this a veterans-only game.

SUMMARY

A no-frills, powerful chess program with some nifty features that will appeal to the serious player. Beginners need not apply.

eighty percent

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No, the creature above is not a Siamese turkey, but is, in fact, a Puppeteer. Think of all the sage and onion you'd need.

CD 'talkie' adventures are all the rage at the moment. Dino Boni checks out the latest title in the *Ringworld* series.

Return to Ringworld

The *Ringworld* universe is based on a series of books by the celebrated author, Larry Niven. The first part of the series saw the heroes of the game stop a plan to eradicate a highly intelligent race known as the Puppeteers. After a visit to the strange planet of Ringworld, they stopped the massive battleship with an antimatter explosion, but they have now been branded as criminals and forced to exile themselves on Ringworld. In the guise of Quinn, one of the heroes, you attempt to clear your name, and those of your crewmates.

The game starts as you get up from a good night's sleep. Your bedroom is pretty sparse, lacking in the creature comforts. The first thing you notice is the lack of imagination that's gone into the design of the game's backgrounds, which look like a cross between Star Wars and Red Dwarf. Exploring the room is the first priority. After a few clicks of the mouse, you discover a few objects. These all have baffling scientific names and are for the most part, completely incomprehensible.

Exploring the rest of the ship is simply a matter of walking around until you find a turbo lift. From here, you access other floors and explore further. You can enter a small selection of rooms in which you find more baffling objects and some scientifically-blinding machines. This is the major problem with this game; you don't really know what you're supposed to be doing when you first play the game. There's only one thing to do, and that's talk to the rest of the crew.

There are two other people aboard the Lance of Truth (that's your stolen ship). Miranda is a human engineer who prides herself on her efficient practices and independent nature. The other crew

member (and captain of the ship) is Seeker, a member of the cat-like Kzin race. You can control either of these characters by clicking the right mouse button and then selecting the character icon, although all you can do with them to start with is talk about sci-fi ship problems. It seems like it's up to Quinn to solve a problem with the Quantum Drive, but where is it?

This game is full of dead-end situations. Every adventure game needs its puzzles, but before you can solve a puzzle, you need to know what you have to do. In *Return to Ringworld*, you aren't even given the slightest hint concerning what to do next. This leads to frustration; not a good thing to feel while playing a game.

The speech in the game is very good, which makes you feel that this game could've been really special if only they had paid a little more attention to the gameplay. As it stands, it is okay, but the lack of direction in the gameplay will leave a lot of people feeling left out on the sidelines. A definite case of 'try before you buy'.

● **DINO BONI**

Bedrooms in the future will be clean, metallic and very, very boring to look at.

The computer console in your bedroom gives access to the ship's computers.

FULL POWER

Return to Ringworld CD
Publisher: Time Warner Interactive
Contact: 0604-790-785
Developer: Tsunami
Price: £44.99

REQUIREMENTS

386DX or above; 4Mb RAM;
CD-ROM drive;
VGA; mouse.
Supports: SoundBlaster.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Nice 3D Studio animated intro.
– In-game graphics are very bland.

Sound
+ Very good speech throughout the game and some good music.

Playability
– The puzzles are there, but you're lost for half the time.

SUMMARY

Return to Ringworld is okay as it stands, but if a little bit more thought had gone into the game design, then this would've been a definite must-buy.

sixty-eight percent

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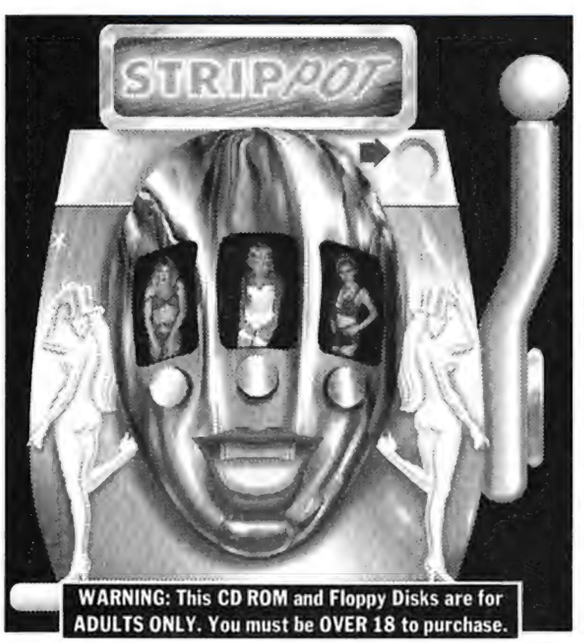

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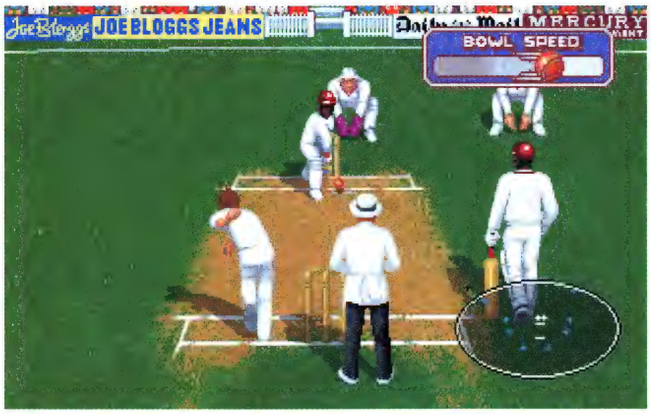
The man himself. Widely regarded as the best cricket player in the world, this man not only managed to clock up 375 runs against England, but he also had to bat for 12 hours to do it!



Brian Lara's Cricket

Brian Lara broke a cricketing record in April, 1994 which had existed long before he was even born – the most runs in a test match (374). Dino Boni investigates his game.

Audiogenic have used this superb sportsman as the 'front-end' for their latest cricket sim. Cricket may well be a difficult game to make into a good computer sim, but nevertheless, Audiogenic have slaved away for many moons to produce something that's not only playable, but fun to boot.

Once you have selected your teams and have decided who will bat first, you are presented with the main in-game view. Positioned above the near wicket, it's reminiscent of the view adopted by TV camera teams. If you are batting, then you're put in control of your batsman, who is pictured (as are all the players) by a large, detailed sprite. The batsman has around ten different strokes available to him, but the one that will be used the most is the defensive stroke. This is used when the batsman cannot take the risk of giving away his wicket to a dodgy ball, and so simply hits the ball to the ground without putting any power in it.

The bowler does not have as much control over his deliveries as the batter does. There are three types of bowler (and, hence bowl) in the game; Spin, Swing and Fast. A Spin bowler attempts to hit the wicket by putting spin on the ball, making it change direction when it hits the ground, while a Fast bowler relies on lightning quick deliveries to get his wickets. If you're in control of the bowler, the first thing to do is to decide where the ball will hit the ground before it bounces up to the batsman. This is done by moving a small box around the crease as an aiming point. The rest is really done by the computer, except for when you are in control of a fast bowler where you have to waggle the joystick to get more speed.

The game tries to be as close to real cricket as possible; it will even rain the game off occasionally! You can set up your fielders, change the batting order and even change your batsman for a left-handed variant. The graphics, sound and general presentation show how much work has gone into this game, even if it does look like a direct port from *World Class Cricket*.

Brian Lara's Cricket is a must for all fans of the sport, but if you loathe the game, then you may think that playing this game is about as boring as watching the real thing. It can be slow at times, but then again, so is the real game. One for the budding armchair batsman then.

The in-game options allow you to change the bowler, or to arrange your fielders into a more advantageous position. You also get the option to abandon the match, should the tedium start getting to you.

● **DINO BONI**

FULL POWER

Brian Lara's Cricket
Publisher: Audiogenic
Contact: 081-861-1166
Developer: In House
Price: £29.99 (Future Zone only)

REQUIREMENTS

386SX or above; 2Mb RAM; hard disk; VGA.
Supports: SoundBlaster; joystick.

BREAKDOWN

Graphics
+ Large and detailed sprites, plus some nice still screens.

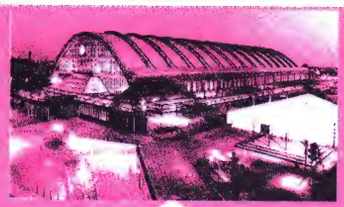
Sound
– The sound is good, but there simply isn't enough of it.

Playability
+ Great fun if you're into cricket...
– ...but unappealing if you're not.

SUMMARY

A good game for cricket fans that will keep them occupied throughout the football season, but the rest of us should try before we buy.

seventy percent



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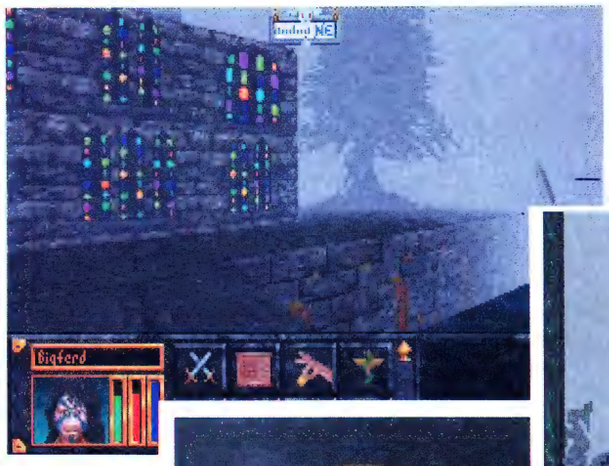
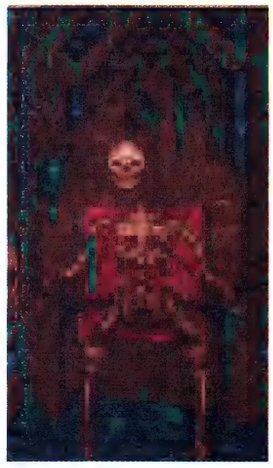
The Power Test



3-D role-playing games introduce you to Orcs, goblins, magicians and whole bestiaries full of monsters, all presented in a Doom-style 3-D, first-person-perspective. The best offer a good storyline and atmospheric graphics.



There are so many 3-D role playing games around at the moment that choosing the best one to buy could be a real nightmare. Erstwhile PC Player Dep Ed. Paul Mallinson checks out six of the best 3-D RPGs at the moment in the first of a new series called 'The Power Test'.

Ever thought "I know, I'll buy a flight sim/RPG/graphic adventure/" (insert genre of your choice), then gone out and stood in front of the shelves in Game, looking shifty 'cos you just can't decide which is the best to get, and you can only afford one at a time? Yes? Then this new, regular feature is just the thing for you.

Each month, our Power Test feature will select a gaming genre and sort the sheep from the goats, the saints from the sinners, the bad apples from the barrel (you know what I mean). With our comprehensive guide you'll be well armed to deal with those tricky purchasing decisions and will be well able to hold your own in after-dinner conversation and cocktail party chit-chat!

So be sure not to miss a single issue of PC Power and, before you know it, you'll be the proud owner of the most comprehensive gaming guide in history!

Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession

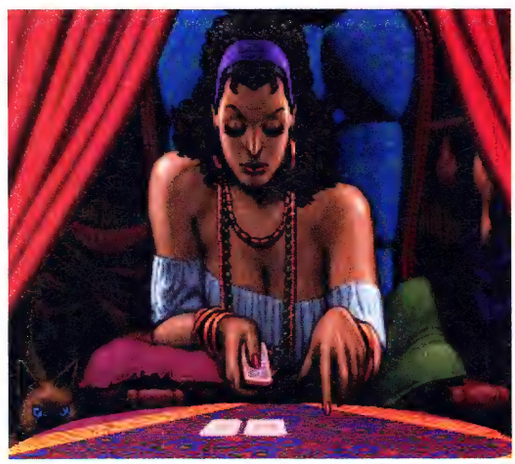
Publisher/Developer: US Gold/SSI
Price: £44.99 (CD and floppy)
Requirements: 386DX; VGA; 4Mb RAM; mouse.
Supports: All major sound cards.

TSR produce some of the most successful over-the-table role playing campaign settings in the world. The Ravenloft series is one of their most popular. This computer translation puts you up against one of the most powerful Vampyrs in the Ravenloft world – Strahd von Zarovich; an undead master of the realm.

The biggest downer about *Ravenloft* is that, atmospherically, it could have been so much better. The TSR campaign setting is very atmospheric – weather plays an important role and domain rulers even have the power to control the rising and falling of the sun. This computer incarnation excludes many of these important details and, as a result, the atmosphere created by the game is relatively lame.

But it's not all bad news; *Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession* makes up for the above deficiency in other ways. Firstly, the character interaction is extremely good. There are plenty of interesting non-player characters (NPCs) to talk to – each adding their own little sub-plot to the ever-growing storyline. Some even join your party from time to time, increasing the characters under your control to a maximum of four. Secondly, the game is huge and puzzles are well above the norm. Also, the game interface offers three completely different methods of control using various mouse and keyboard combinations.

Strahd's Possession has some of the finest still graphics I have ever seen – they really are wonderfully drawn and beautifully coloured. Unfortunately (there always has to be a down-side doesn't there?), the 3-D graphics in the main part of the game do lack in the imagination department. Aside from the aforementioned atmosphere problems, *Strahd's Possession* is quite a smart 3-D role-player. It doesn't matter if you're a fan of the TSR original or not – a trip to castle Ravenloft could be just what you're looking for.



Shadowcaster

Publisher/Developer: EA/Origin
Price: £44.99
Requirements: 386DX; 4Mb RAM; VGA; mouse.
Supports: All major sound cards.

EA surprised everyone with this 3-D RPG some months ago – not least because the graphics engine was supplied by *Doom* creators, iD Software. Needless to say, the spectacular fantasy graphics were phenomenally smooth (especially running on a 486) and the 3-D environment completely believable.

As Kirt, the hero of the game, you are forced to hunt down an evil shape-shifter called Veste who earlier had abducted your beloved Grandfather. Luckily for you, Kirt is also the last in a long line of shape-shifters and can morph into various forms at will.

The labyrinth inside which Veste is holding your Grandfather is populated by a plethora of vicious monsters and devious puzzles. To defeat Veste, ultimately freeing ol' pops, you must travel through 23 huge levels collecting weapons, spells and other useful items along the way.

As I mentioned earlier, the graphics and general atmospherics are top-notch throughout the game, but the biggest problem experienced RPG players will have with *Shadowcaster* is that the game is far too easy. Determined adventurers may wade through the entire game in less than 24 hours. The recently released CD version does add a couple of extra levels that require deft character manipulation in order to progress successfully, which is a definite plus.

Less experienced gamers should warm to *Shadowcaster* immediately – hardened sword-swingers may want more substantial thrills for their hard-earned pennies.

Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss

The door is locked.
The door is locked.
The door is locked.
You see a marble floor.
You see a marble floor.
You cannot pick that up.
You cannot pick that up.
You cannot pick that up.
The plaque reads: Here be the Grand Staircase which descends through all levels of the Abyss. - Kormagnus

Publisher/Developer: EA/Origin
Price: £39.99 (Both Ultima games out on one CD for £39.99)
Requirements: 386; 4Mb RAM; VGA; mouse.
Supports: SoundBlaster; AdLib.

Two years ago this game punched complacent RPGs from their pedestals the world over. The new style 3-D graphics (more realistic than those in *Wolfenstein*) were a revelation – opening new dimensions in computer role-playing technology.

Richard Garriot's Avatar character, resurrected into the hollowed-out volcano world of the Abyss, once again finds himself battling all manner of strange monsters in order to rescue a young maiden by the name of Arial. The Abyss itself is a huge place, many levels deep, and is very varied and deviously designed. Precarious platforms and water-filled caverns feature heavily – leaping across pillars spanning a bottomless shaft even adds a platform element to the adventuring!

Possibly the best feature of this game is the interaction with NPCs. Whereas many other RPGs tend to rely too much on the combat elements of the gameplay, *The Stygian Abyss* contains a wealth of interesting characters with whom you can converse. Some offer simple clues, others bear gifts. All have lots to say – adding a great deal to the proceedings.

The rune stone magic system is also excellently implemented but pays more than a passing resemblance to the magic system first seen in FTL's ancient Dungeon Master. Combat is easy to handle and the mouse controls take little practise to master.

Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss was, and still is, a classic game of its type – superseded only by its superior brother, *Labyrinth of Worlds*.

Ultima Underworld: Labyrinth of Worlds

Publisher/Developer: EA/Origin
Price: £39.99 (Both Ultima games out on one CD for £39.99)
Requirements: 386; 2Mb RAM; VGA; mouse.
Supports: SoundBlaster; AdLib; Roland.

spock
Lord British
Greetings, Avatar! Shall we begin this meeting?
1. By all means, my lord.
2. Not just yet. I have something I must attend to, first.

The sequel to the highly successful *Stygian Abyss* takes the show-stopping features of the first game and nitro-boosts them into something really, really special. Again you assume the role of the Avatar – this time attempting to rescue the inhabitants of Britannia from the evil clutches of The Guardian. During a period of celebration at the castle of Lord British, The Guardian entombs the building inside a blackrock gem barrier. Offering your services to the King, you set out on a long and dangerous journey through eight demon-infested dungeons, in the hope that somewhere you'll find an exit to the outside world.

The playing area is now some 30% bigger, but unfortunately there is no option to blow up to full screen. Still, this doesn't matter too much because the richness and quality of the rest of the game easily makes up for this.

The game is very similar to *The Stygian Abyss* – the controls are the same, the spell system is more or less the same, even the command icons are exactly the same. But where *Labyrinth* excels is in presentation and interaction. The graphics, especially the texture-maps, are much improved and there are loads more characters and monsters to interact with . Getting stuck on the edges of walls is still a problem, and the texture-maps warp if you get up close to them.

Labyrinth is a very big game which will keep budding adventurers occupied for months. Whether this is still the best 3-D RPG around is still open to some debate, especially in the light of more recent additions to the genre.

PC POWER RECOMMENDED THE COMPLETE PC ENTERTAINMENT PACKAGE

Hexx

Publisher/Developer: Psygnosis
Price: £39.99
Requirements: 386; 4Mb RAM; VGA; mouse.
Supports: All major sound cards.

Hexx (formerly titled *Wizard!*) attracted extremely mixed reviews from the press when it was initially released a couple of months back.

Personally, I believe *Hexx* rivals the 1994 World Cup final in the let-down stakes. The game does have the potential to be a worthwhile addition to the 3-D role playing genre, but in the end falls far short of an acceptable mark. The main problem as far as I'm concerned is the combat system. If you're stood there, hacking away at some deformed rat in a green robe, you have no indication of the damage you are inflicting, or if you're hitting the creature at all. Combat is far too 'automatic' for my liking, and the spell casting systems don't do much to back it up either. Granted, there are tons of spells to buy and experiment with, but none are as visually appealing as those encountered in *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*.

The gameplay also leaves a lot to be desired. Most of the puzzles are of the 'find the right key for right door' ilk, which does become very annoying after a while. Graphically this game is very poor, too. The texture maps are repetitive, garish, lacking in detail and move nowhere near as smoothly as those seen in *Shadowcaster* or *Labyrinth of Worlds* – despite what the publishers claim on the game's packaging.

There are some nice touches, such as the ability to save a game into RAM by simply pressing R and a very comprehensive automap feature. Erm... and that's about it really. Not much is it?

The Elder Scrolls: Arena

Publisher/Developer: US Gold/Bethesda
Price: £44.99
Requirements: 386 DX; 4Mb RAM; VGA; mouse.
Supports: All major sound cards.

Thrown into a deep, dark dungeon by arch-fiend Jagar Tharn, you awake with a sore head and an empty inventory. Visions fill your head – remnants of a visitation from an apparition which told you how Tharn had taken the guise of the Emperor and planned to rule the land of Tamriel. Only the Staff of Chaos could defeat this dastardly foe, and you have been chosen to locate it.

Once out of the dungeon and properly kitted-out, the adventure begins in earnest. Tamriel is a huge Empire divided into nine provincial areas, littered with villages, towns and cities, all of which can be explored at will. The denizens are, on the whole, very co-operative – providing gossip, information and even work. Talking to any of them will usually throw up numerous clues as to where your quest should be heading.

Monsters come thick and fast as you progress. Weapon and armour upgrades are essential for survival, as is a grasp of the comprehensive magic system. There's even a Spellmaker, allowing construction of user-defined magic.

Although graphically rough around the edges, *Arena* manages to create a superbly tense atmosphere through effective use of weather, light, music and sound. Hearing the recognisable grunt of an axe-wielding goblin while yomping through dense woods in deep fog is not a heartening experience!

***Arena* is the first in a proposed long line of *Elder Scrolls* adventures, and if this first instalment is anything to go by, any further releases will be very warmly received by this reviewer.**

Presentation

Graphically, *Shadowcaster* comes out top-dog. The 3-D environment engine, supplied by iD, runs very smoothly and the texture maps are colourful and detailed. Enhancing this even further are the fog atmospherics, the character morphing sequences and the superb underwater levels. CD-ROM owners should choose the enhanced version of the game – with its superb pre-rendered introductory sequences and extra levels, it knocks the floppy disk version into a cocked hat.

The *Elder Scrolls: Arena*, although rough-looking in comparison to *Shadowcaster*, is also very well presented. True, the polygonal buildings sometimes seem to 'split' (gaps appear between connected sections) and on full detail the game runs like treacle, but again the beautiful fog, snow and rain atmospherics make up for these deficiencies.

Both *Labyrinth of Worlds* and *Stygian Abyss* appear reasonably similar in appearance. *Abyss* does have a very small play window and the 3-D graphics are basic compared to the newer stuff around today, but it does manage to hold its own – especially in comparison to, say, *Hexx*. *Labyrinth of Worlds* is almost two years old now but the presentation throughout is still impeccable. Some of the in-game characters are a little blocky (with the exception of maybe *Shadowcaster*, all these games have relatively blocky characters) but the rest of the graphics are excellent – especially the wood panelling textures. Turn the detail low on a 486 and the bloody thing shifts, I can tell you!

Potentially the best of the bunch, *Ravenloft* just misses the mark as far as moving 3-D graphics are concerned. The still images, seen throughout most of the game, are absolutely brilliant – definitely some of the best graphics I've seen in a PC game. The *Doom*-style engine, however, sports garish and undetailed texture maps and, to be honest, the sprites aren't much cop either. Again, an enhanced CD version – with full digitised speech – goes some way towards rectifying these problems.

Unfortunately for Psygnosis, *Hexx* really isn't very good in either the sonic or the visual department. The graphics are repetitive and garish, the sprites are awful (in terms of definition and animation) and the sound is a bleeping cacophony. And I mean bleeping.

Atmosphere

Question: what is an RPG without atmosphere? Answer: a waste of money. Well, maybe that is a bit too harsh but these games are designed to enhance the suspension of disbelief – to draw the player into a dark room before scaring them to death by throwing hideous monsters at them! Yes, these games can be very scary, and a good atmosphere can only add to this.

Despite a great storyline, *Ravenloft* is criminally lacking in terms of atmosphere. The TSR adventures are usually dread-laden experiences but it seems that the programmers at SSI have forgotten all about atmosphere, which is a real pity because this particular game could have been the be-all and end-all of RPGs.

TES: Arena, on the other hand, is very atmospheric – despite the aforementioned graphical shortcomings. I particularly liked the snowy cities, entombed in fog. The darkened dungeons also tend to make their mark on the player – especially when a distant monster growls in glee at the prospect of sinking its teeth into your flesh!

Shadowcaster, too, is very similar to *Arena* in that a credible atmosphere is created by the weather conditions and an effective use of sound effects. It's a pity that light-sourcing/diminishing isn't used to quite the same degree as seen in *Arena*. *Shadowcaster's* corridors seem relatively 'light' in comparison.

The lighting effects in *Hexx* are, rather predictably, not up to scratch. If your party is carrying a lit torch, the room is light. As the torch burns down, the room becomes dark. This simplicity isn't a problem, it's just that it adds nothing to the overall atmosphere of the game. Sound effects too could be so much better. Even with a 16-bit SoundBlaster card the sound effects are horrible.

The *Ultima Underworld* games are very atmospheric. The small playing area of *Abyss* is a tad claustrophobic, but this doesn't detract from play. The darkness of the vast caverns is foreboding, and the many monsters and non-player characters (NPCs) add a richness to the overall adventure.

"Players who haven't sampled the delights of *Labyrinth* may wonder why such an old game has beaten later RPGs. Veteran *Underworld* players will nod in agreement."

Interface

Although *Abyss* and *Labyrinth* have done extremely well in every other category of this Power Test, there are a few niggling problems with the way that they handle during play. The biggest problem I had was that, upon walking into the corner of a room, I'd invariably end up caught for a split second and the screen would flip-out – juddering all over the shop. Both games suffer from this and although it's not a major glitch it does happen more often than I'd like.

Overall, the control systems encountered in all the games are very good. *Hexx's* combat system, as mentioned earlier, is poor. When up close to a combatant, clicking the 'fight' icon initiates a sort of auto-combat mode. Apart from the icon lighting up, there is no other indication that combat is going on – no sword swinging, or anything. *Hexx* does give the player a chance to control a party of four characters (as does *Ravenloft*) but too much importance is allocated to character positioning. This is because, unlike other RPGs such as *Dungeon Master* and *Eye of the Beholder*, you can't reposition your characters once they've been selected. To my mind, this is a serious shortcoming of the game – but, let's face it, *Hexx* is full of them.

The *Ravenloft* programmers had the foresight to include three different control methods that can be used separately or in conjunction with each other – cursors, mouse pointer or arrow icons. The player can also move around quite freely within the 3-D world or, alternatively, a more structured 'location to location' style (a la *Dungeon Master*) can be chosen. The *Ultima Underworld* games also allow the same sort of movement, to some extent.

Shadowcaster is a breeze to get to grips with, but passing carried objects between characters can be a real pain because of the constant morphing (which takes time and energy). *Arena*, too, handles well, even though some inventory screens seem a tad too deeply buried for my liking (i.e. you must pass through two other screens to get to them).

Puzzles/Logic

Role-playing games are basically puzzle games in disguise – you have a task to do; you do it and you progress. Some RPGs have logical tasks, many others confuse the player with illogical situations and hyper-cryptic puzzles.

Hexx's problem is that it is just far too straightforward to be captivating. Searching through twisting mazes looking for the right coloured key for the right coloured door soon begins to pall after a while. Again, I'm not being unfair – I played the game for a long, long time and it never seemed to improve.

The puzzles in *Ravenloft* are very well crafted and expertly implemented into the unfurling story. For example, visit the albino werewolf and he will ask you to hunt down the werewolf that bit him in order to sever the bloodline – thus reverting him to human form once more. No key hunting here (much).

Logical thinking isn't essential for players of *Shadowcaster* – there are some simple puzzles (open a door by placing a skull onto a headless skeleton, for example) but nothing too taxing.

The only game here that does have a few problems in the logic department is *Arena* – if only because there are a lot of riddles to solve throughout the game and some of them are really hard. The rest of the game is of the standard 'here's a quest – go and fetch whatever' style.

All of the games featured here follow a relatively linear path. *Hexx's* inherent linearity is far too strict – you don't feel quite as free to explore as you do in the other five titles. Still, at least you can play the game safe in the knowledge that you can go through an entire dungeon without overlooking anything! *Arena*, on the other hand, may be far too big and free for some people. Getting lost can be a problem, so careful movement planning is necessary.

Conclusion

Players who haven't yet had a chance to sample the delights of *Labyrinth of Worlds* may well be confused as to why such an old game has leapfrogged even more recent RPG titles to top this month's Power Test. On the other hand, veteran *Underworld* players will sit there nodding in agreement. It's a real experience to play the game, even nowadays. The reason I rate the game more highly than the rest is because of the superb interaction with the many NPCs. In many ways it reminds me of SSI's *Eye of the Beholder* series of adventures in that there are plenty of friendly characters to converse with, as well as the usual monsters. *TES: Arena* also has a huge amount of NPCs with which to converse, but for some reason they're not as visually or characteristically interesting as the ones found in either of the *Ultima Underworld* adventures. While we're on the subject of characters, both *Hexx* and *Shadowcaster* suffer from a lack of friendly NPCs – both are very combat-oriented which means that there is scant opportunity for meaningful conversation along the way. The interaction in *Ravenloft* is the strongest feature of the game – the entwining storyline is second to none and the excellent character illustrations really make a difference too.

Although strangely addictive for a short while, *Hexx* is easily the worst of the bunch. Poor graphics, abysmal sound and dull, repetitive gameplay does not a decent RPG make. *Shadowcaster*, to be honest, did well by virtue of its superlative visuals. As an entry-level RPG it comes highly recommended but more experienced players will be able to complete it on the same day of purchase.

If it's a challenge you're after, then *Arena* should appeal. Over 100 hours of playing time await patient players. At times the going can get very tough. It would also not be unfair to mention that there are a few bugs present in some versions of the game, but there are patch disks available.

Overall, the *Ultima Underworld* games, despite their age, end up doing really well. *Arena* and *Ravenloft*, both from the US Gold stable, are fine RPGs but for different reasons – if *Arena's* graphics had been as good as *Shadowcaster's* it would have been rated even higher. Similar in terms of gameplay but worlds apart, *Shadowcaster* and *Hexx* bring up the rear – *Hexx* lagging by far the furthest behind. **PC POWER**

Final score	
Labyrinth of Worlds	**92%**
Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession	**88%**
The Elder Scrolls: Arena	**86%**
The Stygian Abyss	**85%**
Shadowcaster	**80%**
Hexx	**49%**

Budget reviews

Not enough money for a full-price game? Fret no more, because Dino Boni shows you some budget packages that will give you twice the pleasure for half the money.

Twin Calibre (compilation CD)
Publisher: Hit Squad
Price: £19.99

Pack 1 – Dune & Robocop 3

Dune is a graphical adventure based on the books of the same name. In the Dune universe, the most powerful substance known to man is called 'Spice'. This substance facilitates space travel, prolongs human life and can also create magical powers, but there's one slight problem. The spice can only be found on one world, and that's yours.

You play the part of a young prince who must organise the surrounding population to produce as much as possible. During your travels, you pick up pieces of information that will aid you in your search, plus your father may give you other missions to complete. The other side of the game is the strategy element – you must organise your allied forces into armies and spice miners. Armies are very important, as everyone in the universe wants your spice.

As for *Robocop 3*, this is a conversion of an Amiga game designed and written by DID, the people behind *Inferno*. You are the infamous metal copper who has to protect the homeless people of Delta City from the ravages of the Police. In the great name of profit, OCP are throwing people out of their homes, and Robocop decides enough is

enough and joins forces with the rebellion.

The game is made up of sections, each with a specific purpose. The first section sees you in a car, chasing after a suspect. After a while, you get the message to help Officer Lewis who is in trouble. The graphics are non-shaded vectors, and look just as old as the game itself. The rest of the game involves shooting lots of people, wandering around and shooting even more people. My kind of violence!

The game does get better the more you play it, but don't hold your breath; it isn't that good. Once you've played it a few times, then the novelty starts to wear off, but at least it runs pretty well on today's 486 PCs.

Score: 80%

Pack 2 – Indy 500 & Wing Commander

Wing Commander is the game that started Chris Roberts on the road to fame, fortune and glory. It was also the first to use bit-mapped, 3-D sprites in the game, and so created a lot of attention when it was released a few years ago.

Because the top-end machine in those days was perhaps a 386DX-40, the game runs too fast on the majority of 486 machines that are common today. The instructions tell you that DX users (like myself) should consider playing the game from hard disk and turning the Turbo button on to slow it down. Naww! I want to play it fast, mate!

The story is a well-known one; humanity is currently locked in a savage war against the Kilrathi, a breed of bi-pedal cats with a hate of anything human. They want to wipe us off the face of the Galaxy, and needless to say, the human race is keen not to let that happen.

You play a pilot for the Confederation, who has to fly a series of missions in order to win the day for us humans. The first mission sees you piloting a fairly basic ship against pretty easy enemy fighters, but as the game progresses, the missions get harder.

This game is still a classic. The graphics are fairly good, but are now starting to show their age, but if you can't wait for *Wing Commander 3* (like me!), then this is a good game to hone your Kilrathi killing skills before they're really put to the test in the new *Wing Commander* game, due out in November.

Indy 500, on the other hand, is a different kettle of fish all together. Based around the famous American car race, *Indy 500* puts you in the driving seat of one of their 600 Bhp, 220 MPH cars for the gruelling, 200

BUDGET CHART

Moving on up | No change | Moving on down | Brand new entry

1	(2)	Doom	90%	Titanium Seal	£14.99
2	(7)	Doom	90%	Micro Star	£14.99
3	(1)	Doom	90%	Gold Medal	£6.60
4	(NE)	Windows French	NA%	Premier Collection	£9.99
5	(NE)	Fun Learning	NA%	Premier Collection	£9.99
6	(NE)	Arcade Pool	90%	Team 17	£9.99
7	(NE)	Populous	85%	Hit Squad	£14.99
8	(6)	Easy to Learn Computing	NA%	Premier Collection	£6.99
9	(10)	Word Games For Windows	NA%	Premier Collection	£9.99
10	(NE)	Doom (vol. 3)	90%	Gold Medal	£12.99

O Last month's position

lap race. You can change any aspect of your car, right down to the gear ratios in an attempt to shave those vital few hundredths of a second off your lap times.

The view is made up of filled vector graphics, which move very smoothly now that the processor speed has increased a little. The driving is not as simulation-oriented as *Indycar*, but this game is meant to be more fun. You can even get an action replay of your last few seconds of race from six different camera views.

The game is faithful to the rules, and includes all of the pace car, yellow flag and green flag rules found in this American version of Formula One. The best fun to be had, by far, however, is driving your car the wrong way around the circuit, smashing into the opposition and then watching the action replay! Not the most effective way of winning a race, but more fun than driving around in circles for 200 laps!

Score: 88%

Pack 3 – LHX Attack Chopper & Birds of Prey

Birds of Prey is a mammoth flight sim. 40 aircraft are included for you to fly, including fighters, bombers and massive Boeing 747 jumbos. You can take a plane on a number of different missions, depending on your mood at the time. Bombing runs, intercept missions and ground attack scenarios are included in the game.

Birds of Prey wasn't a very big hit when it was released, but I can't see why. The graphics may not be as good as in *TFX*, but they're adequate for the game. Where *Birds of Prey* really comes into its own is in the gameplay. Each of the aircraft handles differently, and has its own unique flight characteristics. Flying a fighter plane is pretty simple, but fly a 747, and you suddenly develop a great respect for commercial airline pilots all over the world. The missions range from the extremely easy to the downright impossible. A record of your score is kept on the hard disk, and you can play an on-going campaign or just a single mission when you feel like it.

Overall, *Birds of Prey* has its weak points, such as the lack of any decent sound effects, but nevertheless, it's still an enjoyable game. And for a tenner, you can't really go wrong.

LHX has been released on quite a few formats, including the Amiga and even the MegaDrive. In this combat/flight sim, you take control of a powerful helicopter and have to pilot it through increasingly difficult missions.

The LHX chopper is a fictional helicopter, but every effort has been made to keep a 'realistic' feel to the whole game. You can also pilot one of the real range of helicopters if you so choose, but these aren't as powerful as the imaginary LHX.

The graphics in the game are fairly good and move very smoothly on a high-end 486. Again, they are made up of the non-shaded vector type that permeated so many flight sims and arcade games in the early days of PC gaming. The game supports outside views, which is a tribute to the programmers of the time, but for the most part, you'll fly the helicopter from the cockpit view.

Although *LHX* isn't a patch on *Gunship*, it's still a good game. The graphics still look okay even by today's high standards and bundled together with *Birds of Prey*, this pack is really only for dedicated flight-sim fans.

Score: 75%

Arcade Pool

Publisher: Team 17
Price: £9.99

Now, any game for a tenner has got to be good value in these days of £50+ games. Thankfully, ***Arcade Pool*** is a pretty neat game as well.

The action is viewed from overhead, and you can select one of a number of different games to play. Both UK and US rules are catered for, as well as a few funny games. Matches between opponents can be played to the best of one, three or five games, or you can enter up to six players in a full-scale tournament.

The shots are controlled via the mouse. Using the left mouse button, you select where you want the ball to go, and then select the power rating of the shot from a meter in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. Once the shot has been selected, a white line shows the path of the ball to the target, and a dotted line shows an approximate path for the cue ball after it hits the target ball. This is useful for calculating rebounds and so on. A quick press of the right mouse button and the shot is taken. There are lots of different games to play, but by far the best of the lot is the Tournament. Choose any playing style, and you (with up to five friends) can take part in a knock-out tournament. The rest of the players are computer-controlled, and you may even spot one or two names in there that seem familiar!

The graphics in *Arcade Pool* are pretty basic, but effective. The balls are all very clearly marked, so there's no confusion when playing and they move around the table with surprising speed. Overall, *Arcade Pool* is a great way to spend a tenner, and will give you many hours of enjoyment.

Score: 90%

American pool. These balls are numbered so you can increase your score if you pot them in numerical order.

Arcade Pool maps out the angles of your shot. Don't you wish that this happened in real life? Or is it just me?

the Public eye

The world of PD is full of turkeys. Dino Boni reviews a brace of PD games, so that the only turkeys you get will be on your table on Christmas Day.

1 - Awful, 2 - Poor, 3 - Average, 4 - Good, 5 - Excellent

Speculator

Publisher: N/A
Supplier: PD Soft

This game is a poor-man's *Sim City*. The basic idea is that you are in charge of a holdings company, and you have to buy land, buildings and shares in order to increase the size of your company. Three other players (computer controlled in one player mode) are aiming to do the same and only one player can win.

The game is split into months with each one lasting around 50 seconds. In this relatively short space of time, you must purchase land and buildings so that you can make money on them at the end of the turn. You can also call up a menu to see how your opponents are doing and block their activities if they are getting too far ahead. That's all there is to it; buy some land, buy some more land and occasionally sell a few shares. Not exactly awe-inspiring, is it?

The entire game is run from a series of icons. Icons are selected with the cursor keys and the lack of mouse support gives this game yet another down-side. The graphics use an EGA screen to display them, so they look as dated as the game itself. Sound is completely non-existent, except for the occasional beep from the internal PC speaker.

This is a lame game in the extreme. If a little bit more effort was put into the gameplay, it could've been a real winner. As it is, it is a no-hoper with about as much charisma as Dave, and that's really bad.

[1]

Bio Menace

Publisher: Apogee
Supplier: PD Soft

I know this is an old game, but I think it deserves a mention. Aliens have taken over the Earth and you are the only person who can get rid of them.

Mystic Towers

Publisher: Apogee
Supplier: Transend

Anyone remember *Knight Lore* on the Spectrum? This is a classic game and was one of the first to use the 'isometric 3-D' view. The action was viewed from above and to the side of the game area, hence the 'isometric' tag.

Mystic Towers follows this tradition, but with a 90's updated version. You are an old magician who has been given the task of removing an evil presence from the land (aren't you always?). To do this, you have to enter a series of towers and kill every monster within them. Simple huh?

Well, not really, because the towers are filled with puzzles that require a little bit more lateral thinking than your average platform game. Objects can be pushed, pulled or even stacked on top of each other and these facilities are essential to complete some of the towers. Magic plays a very important role in the game as well, but you only have a limited amount of spells. More spells can be gained by picking up special objects found in the towers, but these only have a limited amount of spells stored in them. Games designers never make it easy for you, do they?

Your staff is full of spells, but only certain ones will work against monsters. If you are running short of power, you can always jump on them. They don't like this – some of the weaker ones will die instantly while others just get mad! The monsters vary in power and size and some of them will even shoot back, adding to your problems. If this isn't enough, you can be poisoned by special tiles on the floor or by certain monsters. This saps your energy and will lead to your death, eventually, if you are not cured by a heal spell.

The towers are made up of rooms joined by doors and some of these are locked, either by keys or by switches. Finding a key can be just as difficult as killing a monster – some of the switches are placed in really awkward positions. When this happens you are required to make platforms out of objects to stand on; not easy when you're playing the game with the keyboard and even harder when you're playing with a mouse. Joysticks are supported, however, so you can avoid this problem, if you've got one.

This list is the ladder you have to climb to success. Shame there's no hair to climb up.

The graphics in *Mystic Towers* are good, if a little basic, and the same can be said for the sound. The real beauty of the game is in its playability, however. The registered version is huge and should keep many players happy for months, while the shareware game reviewed here only has two towers to play, but they are still very challenging. Apogee have excelled themselves yet again with *Mystic Towers*, and it comes heartily recommended.

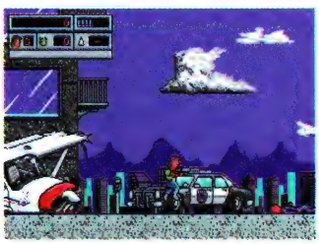
[5]

Some of the monsters you will be up against in Mystic Towers. I think they're in my kitchen.

The Public Eye

Armed with a shotgun, you must go through each level, rescuing hostages and killing everything in your path, eventually unlocking a teleport to take you to the next section.

This is a pretty basic platform game, but there are a few qualities that make it stand out from the rest. Forget the gaudy EGA graphics, because they aren't important here. What is



important is the gameplay, and *Bio Menace* is full to the brim with it. The levels include puzzles that have to be solved by turning on switches and opening doors, allowing you to progress further into the game. The aliens on each level are also slightly intelligent and will follow you around if you don't dispatch them with a few rounds from your shotgun.

You can pick up power-ups for your weapon, such as machine-gun ability and super-bullets which do even more damage than before. Grenades are available to lob at any squishy-looking creature, but these are relatively difficult to come by, so they must be used wisely. Hidden objects are placed around the levels, normally behind the backgrounds. The only real way to discover their presence is to find them by accident and to remember where they are as no clues are given to their whereabouts.

The graphics, as I mentioned before, are of the EGA/CGA ilk. They aren't too bad and some of the animation is quite good, especially when you blast a monster into bits and you can witness their eyeballs and internal organs flying away from the wrecked carcass. This may sound very violent, but I assure you that it is all in good taste (in a Quentin Tarantino-kind of way).

The sound in the game is of a

reasonable quality, but you probably won't pay too much attention to it. *Bio Menace* is a classic gem of a game, and one that is well worth getting, even if it is a little bit old now. It will give you hours of fun, but beware; it's dangerously addictive!

[4]

DEU 5.0
Publisher: N/A
Supplier: Gates of the Underworld BBS – 081-813-5003

DEU is not a game at all, it's a utility to create your own *Doom* levels. The reason that I've included it here is because of the rapidly re-surfacing interest in this classic game.

DEU is a mix of text and graphical interfaces that combine to produce a very powerful utility. Once loaded, you can either modify an existing level in the main *Doom* .WAD file, or create a new one. The new level will be kept in what is known as a PWAD file; this is just an extension of the main file and informs the program of the new level map.

Creating a new level is tricky at first, but with a bit of practise, you can produce some stunning challenges. Each map is made of sectors, which in turn are made of lines and vertices. Each line has to be told whether it's a wall, door or a secret panel. After this, you can give it a texture and assign it to other walls, making a sector.

The floor and ceiling height can be altered for each sector, allowing you to create staircases, tunnels and so forth. In fact, the program can create some ready-made shapes for you. Put in the objects, such as monsters and weapons, and you have a finished level ready to be compiled.

DEU is an essential add-on for any serious *Doom* fan, get it now.

[5]

Contacts

PD Soft
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0702-466-933

Transend Ltd
Moorview Business Park
Leeds Rd, Thackley,
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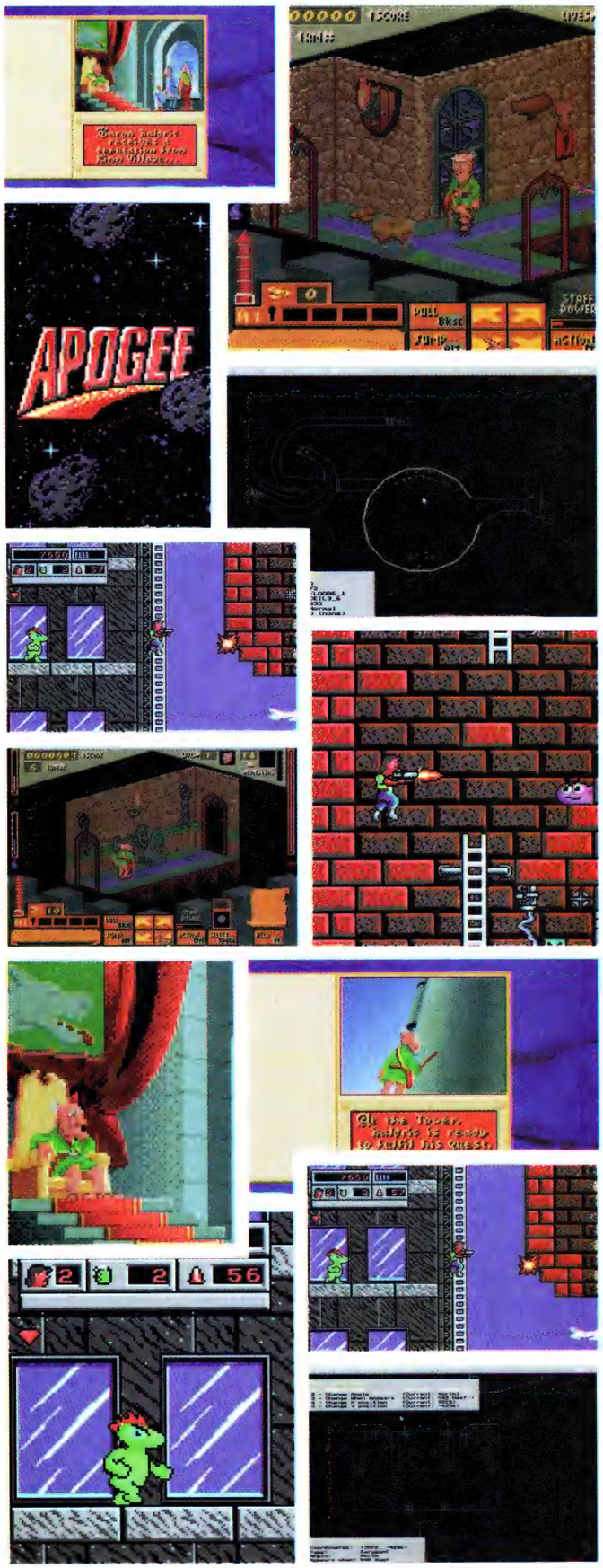

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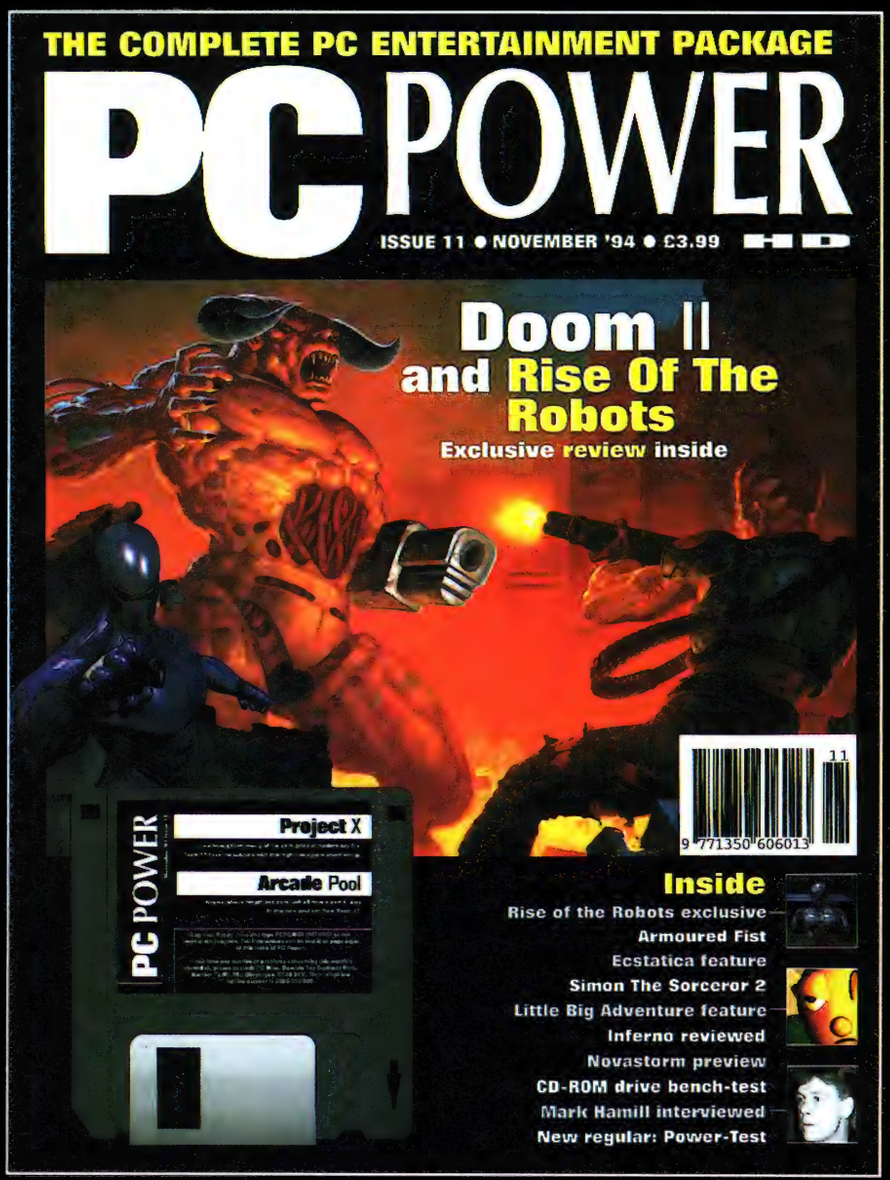

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Dead Letter Box

Whether you are an 'old adventurer' or a 'bold adventurer', sooner or later you're going to need help from the hooded guy with the scythe. He's seen it, done it, and got the T-shirt, and he's here to help you out. Talk quietly, show a bit of respect, and he might let you leave in peace and intact.

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis

I'm in the maze in Atlantis. I've activated the stone machine, got rid of the octopus in the canal, and I've activated the crab. I know that I need to find a statue of some kind, but I can't find it. I also need to get Sofia free, but she won't come out when I open the cage.
Luis Lanca, Portugal.

Sofia won't come out until you give her a special hinge pin which is found in the statue.

It's the Sentry statue in the inner ring that you seek and you must use the raft to get there. Use the stones to open the gate, but remember to pick them up again as you'll need them. The sunstone will undo both gates in the first chamber when used with the spindles above the gates. To gain entrance to the middle ring, use the ladder on the sentry statue, open its chest and replace the missing parts. Use the diagram from the cupboard where the crescent-shaped gear is found. When the bronze gear is on the upper left peg, a bead of orichalcum will move his arm forward. When it is on the lower peg, the arm will move back. Connect the chain to the bronze loop on the door, then swing the statue's arm around until you can attach the other end of the chain to it. Now move the statue's arm back and it will open the door for you.

Return to Zork

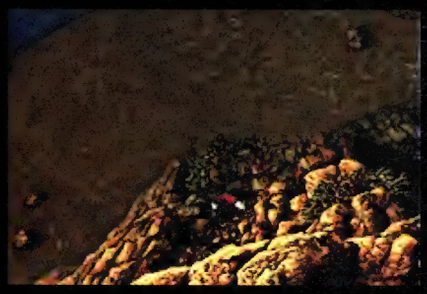
For quite a time now I have been having trouble with the adventure game *Return to Zork*. My problem is the magic tile puzzle. It is not that I cannot work out what it is supposed to say, what I cannot work out is how to arrange the tiles in the correct way to complete the puzzle. I have worked out what it says, (or think I have) but every time I try to do it, it always ends up with two tiles being the wrong way round. You may think I'm not trying hard enough, but I'm sure that I am not the only one who has had trouble with this puzzle, and I think that this so-called 'easy' puzzle is the most difficult part of the entire game. Even though I know what it says, it still has to be completed properly because I know that completing the puzzle gives you one of the disk pieces you need. Another problem I dare to mention – I have finally managed to reach the Troll King, but I can't get him to give me the necklace. I showed him the sword and he says he will give it to you, but he doesn't.
Mark Haggarty, Guernsey.

I fear I can't think of any way to illustrate the method of moving the sliding block puzzle, even if I had recorded the moves, (which I didn't!). I know that the completed message says, "Water unseen at falls mix with bat droppings yields potion for (invisibility). Search for three more pieces on the ground where this (was found)".

As for the nasty Troll King, you need to threaten him with the sword a number of times before he finally turns chicken and hands over the necklace.

Willy Beamish

I recently purchased a Sierra 'oldie' called *The Adventures of Willy Beamish*. It's a good game



until you get permanently stuck on the west side of Frumpton on the third day – trying to get the registration form for the Frog Jumping Contest. Can you help? I always get beaten up by the bullies at West Frumpton.
Z. Taylor, Australia.

I can see the attraction of being able to call upon me when you are being beaten up by bullies. I think they might get a little bit of a shock if I were to suddenly appear. Australia is too far for me to come simply to put the scare on some little bullies, so you're going to have to seek help from another direction. Assuming Skippy the kangaroo is busy rescuing the Flying Doctor, and Jason Donovan is locked away with a singing coach, then you are going to have to look for help from whoever is passing by. Have you thought of asking for help from the Japanese tourists?

Betrayal at Krondor

I bought Sierra's *Betrayal at Krondor* some time ago and I really enjoyed it, until I got stuck in chapter 8. Now I'm desperately seeking help. I've explored the whole island without finding Pug or his daughter, however I found a lot of mysteries instead. For example, why do I drop dead in the south-east corner of the island? And where do I find the spell to kill the Wind Elementals with? Also, there is this big marker in the cave for which I have found no use as yet. Then there is the tent which I cannot enter because of the magical barrier – I haven't found a way to figure that one out either. At last I thought I'd found it, along with an enchanted cup, but Owyn says that Pug will know what to do with it. I've searched the island from top to bottom, but I can't find Pug.
Feike De Rycke, Belgium.

This is an island of many mysteries, none of which are easy to uncover. The first thing to do is head north until you stumble across the marble pillars. 'Click' on the pillars to uncover something of interest. Pug is to be found in the north-east of the island, but to get there you need a bit of magic transport. Take the cup which you found to the Pillar of Dhatsavan, then click on the pillar again.

Before you can use magic on the island you first must find a crystal staff. This wonderful item is found in one of the dwellings in the north-east corner of the island (next to a mountain). Before the staff will work you'll need to rub some crystallised manna on it. You can pick up this everyday ingredient simply by 'left-clicking' on some of the crystal growths which flower around the island.

Dragonsphere

I am writing to you concerning a letter which was published in the August edition. The item was about *Dragonsphere* and you gave the reader wrong information. I have completed the game so I know what I am talking about. The door behind the tapestry can be opened, but from the other side, (which is found down the well). To unlock the door you will need a key-crown which is found in the maze guarded by the toads. Once you get this key-crown and defeat the sorcerer, you then get down the well using a magic belt. Eventually, after releasing the king, you will be able to open the door.
Mrs N. Jones, Derby.

I don't think you understand the rules of this column. The first rule is, "Mister Grim is never wrong". The second rule is, "When Mister Grim says something which 'seems' to indicate that he may be wrong, then we don't talk about it!"

The Secret of Monkey Island

You recently replied to a letter of mine where I asked for help with *Leisure Suit Larry 2*. My problem was getting past the two security guards at the airport. Not only did your help not work, but if you recall, I asked you to print the "exact commands" that I needed to type on the keyboard, which you did not do.

Now I have been out and bought the brilliant game, *The Secret of Monkey Island*. I have managed to beat the Swordmaster and I have also managed to steal the idol from the Mayor's house, but I cannot figure out how to complete the last trial – the art of treasure hunting.

I regret having to write a letter of complaint to you Grim, but I'm sure you can understand why I had to write, so please answer my question 'exactly' as my letter asked you to.
Stuart Wenham, Bexleyheath.

Isn't youth a wonderful thing? When you are young you can twist the tails of tigers, completely unaware of the fact that Fate has just smiled and patted your head indulgently – when it could have kicked your teeth in. Still I'll bide my time, for we all know who has the last word.

I fear that I do not know the 'exact' words you must type to "give the flower", but surely it can't be too difficult to try out a couple of options?

As to your second question I fear it would take too long to give you a complete answer, (you should have told me the 'exact' part that you are stuck on). Perhaps it will help if I tell you how to let the prisoner escape from the jail. Go to the Scumm Bar and pick up as many mugs as you can. Walk into the kitchen and fill one mug with grog. The grog will melt the mug that it's being carried in. To get round this problem you keep transferring the grog from mug to mug. At the jail you can use the mug with the grog in it, on the lock of the cell door.

Have a nice life. And I will see you later...

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- ❑ **PCG531 DOOM SAVE EDITv1.1** Is a utility that allows you to edit your saved games from DOOM in Windows.
- ❑ **PCG532 DOOM THING EDIT2.6B** Alrighty, what you 've all been waiting for.. A DOOM editor! Of course, this thing can 't edit everything.. It can edit the items laying around.
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- ❑ **PCV605 ICON DATABASE** is an icon/bitmap viewer for Windows. It allows you to browse through pages with up to 60 icons/graphics per page from a specified directory. Catalogues of files can be printed.
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- ❑ **PCG377 THE SHADOW KEEP** a 3D world allows you to battle monsters & gather treasure, Mission is of course to explore the surrounding areas. Might and Magic clone.
- ❑ **PCG378 WACKY FRUIT** Fruit machine simulator. Incorporating 3 fruit reels and one feature real, plus many features such as Gamble, Skill chance, Real Holes, Nudges, Meter, and most of all a Real Design.
- ❑ **PCG382 STELCON 2469 VGA** The Ultimate space warsystem game! Supports only high-quality 256 colour graphics! It can be a simple 2 player war game a 5 player campaign! Playing field can have upto 20 star systems, each with its own planets and resources!. Play against a friend or the computer.
- ❑ **PCG383 STELLAR DEFENCE** Space arcade game where you must fight to save your galaxy from the evil armies of the Yarian invaders. Pilot your ship in VGA
- ❑ **PCG384 ULTIMUH VGA** The ultimate role playing game includes scanned in digitized actors, emotion rearing sound track, and dramatic sequences! The best example of RPG in the history of man kind. 8 levels of digitally scanned in graphics.
- ❑ **PCG403 BLAKE STONE 3.0** Is a super risk game which features bitmapped graphics, digital and FM sound, navy, air, carriers, airborne, bases, supply rules, nukes, reinforcements, 1-9 players. Mouse
- ❑ **PCG403 BLAKE STONE VGA** In 1992 came Wolfenstien. Blakes Bigger, & Better with more features, tons better graphics, animations & enemies - 11 new levels. (2)
- ❑ **PCG411 ARGON (EPIC)** Intense arcade action meets bold exploration. You play the role of Malevolence on an expedition through gigantic, action-packed levels in 256 colours, highly animated enemies.
- ❑ **PCG413 SPECULATOR v1.0** Is a real estate strategy game where you can play using real image any land areas. Here's your chance to be a real estate wheeler-dealer, without risking a dime of your hard come by cash. Specilator gives you the chance to test you investment acumen. Very similar to Sim City.
- ❑ **PCG445 HOWITZER v0.90b** Multiplayer artillery combat simulator. 386+, mouse, 800x600x256 Super-VGA required.
- ❑ **PCG448 THE BARD'S QUEST** DUNGEONS OF THE UNKNOWN! This is a NEW 256 colour RPG game from VisionSoft! You must unravel the secrets of the mysterious dungeons of Isil Thanis and discover the ancient Star Light Cult! Several you 'll be playing for hours! Includes Soundblaster sound support. Requires: VGA/MCGA, 640K, 386 or better. Optional: Soundblaster, Adl.ib.(2)
- ❑ **PCG454 BATTLE CHARGE vga** is a 2-player strategy game played by moving neutral and charged pieces within a distribution of pieces from two opposing sets. The objective is to capture your opponent 's king
- ❑ **PCG457 ROAD KILL v1.02 VGA** Find and Kill the enemy cars. You car is red and the enemy is blue, or will be when you get through with them. Your car will be damaged by enemy bullets and by crashing into things.
- ❑ **PCG458 WALLS OF BRATOCK** The best shareware role-playing game ever! Stunning VGA colour graphics, digitized sound effects and music and digitized sounds, + and two great cinematic cut-scenes. Fight fearsome monsters and talk to dozens of people as a monstrous quest unfolds before you!.
- ❑ **PCG459 WALL $TREET RAIDER** (v4.1) The corporate takeover game and simulation the ultimate in gritty realism. Investing in any of 250 companies (IBM, GM, etc.). Ms 16 million. 1 to 4 players, or play against computer. Unique & exciting.
- ❑ **PCG460 ZOOL PLAY (VGA)** A Sonic the Hedgehog clone. This game plays similar to the Sega classic Hedghog.
- ❑ **PCG463 POT O' GOLD** is a multimedia Vegas-style slot machine simulation. It combines digital sound effects with colourful animation
- ❑ **PCG464 MEDWAR v1.1 (WIN)** war game set in medieval times. Allows for up to six human or computer players, handicapping with 24 strength levels, and 14 types of pieces.
- ❑ **PCG465 WINBJACK (WIN)** is a game of Blackjack for Windows. NEW: support for 256 colour displays, animation, sound effects, card counting, statistics.
- ❑ **PCG471 BILLY THE KID v1.0** A 3D VGA Western Action Arcade Game. Many levels, 256 colour scrolling action, Escape from prison, survive the New Mexico desert, rattle snakes, buffaloes, etc. face deadly enemies, Apache warriors and Sheriff Pat Garret's lethal six gun!. Req 286+
- ❑ **PCG472 HEAVY WATER JOGER** You are Fred Fluke, jogger extraordinaire, and you've GOTTA find your way through the huge maze that is the plant - avoid the courtesy robots, jump the pits, avoid radiation sickness, keep from getting your Ree Buks wet, find the keycards. Req VGA
- ❑ **PCG473 GRIDLOCK v2.0** lets you control traffic in a section of a city. You can decide what kinds of lights or stop signs to use and set the timing of the lights. The computer provides the traffic. You can program 2 test cars. Avoid gridlock.
- ❑ **PCG477 DRAWPERF V2.02** is pseudo vector graphics game; that is, it is an attempt to use only line drawings to make everything work. I used, as inspiration, an arcade video game I first encountered around 1984 as a student at SWTSU in San Marcos, Texas. Hints: use all the function and challenge keys.
- ❑ **PCG475 JELLY BEAN FACTORY** Addicting puzzle game. 256 colour graphics with digitized music and sound effects. Supports Sound Blaster & Pro, and joystick.
- ❑ **PCG476 NETHACK! v3.1** Dungeons & Dragons like game where you (adventurer) descend into the depths of the dungeon in search of the Amulet of Yendor Have Fun, and Happy Hacking!
- ❑ **PCG477 WILDLIFE TETRIS** Is a Classic Tetris type game in VGA 256 colours mode with WildLife pictures in the background.
- ❑ **PCG478 DRAGONFIELD KEEP** AD&D Unlimited Adventures Travel to the distant land of Dragonfield Keep & defeat the evil army of the Dark Wizard! An RPG game
- ❑ **PCG479 SIR GUY GALLANT** is a mystery adventure game set in mid-17th century England. It takes place on the property of Gallant Hall. You take on the character of Sir Guy Gallant, a cavalier knight of thatera. You must discover clues as to who killed your father, the late Sir James.
- ❑ **PCG480 SMART GAMBLER** Tired of losing? Smart Gambler is for people who play to win! The unique program that gives the strategies for choosing the best casinos, money management, odds, improving luck and all of the popular games.
- ❑ **PCG482 ULTIMATE GIN v1.01** Enter a fully animated card game with 8 notorious players. Select your favourite and play with Hollywood scoring if desired. EGA+ mouse.
- ❑ **PCG486 BLOODTHIRSTY** is a war strategy game which challenges you to conquer every state on the map. NEW: selecting territories is easier, improved graphical interface.
- ❑ **PCG487 PARATROOPER BOB** He must complete special drills which will require reasoning skills, perseverance, & logic to outwit enemies
- ❑ **PCG492 LEAGUE MANAGER v1.1** Facilitates managing a league of teams by providing an easy to use interface for the input, modification, and display of team data.
- ❑ **PCG497 POOL SHARK v2.3** Computer challenges you to eight ball and nine ball. 3D, VGA pool game. Includes colourful graphics computer generated opponents, on-going betting tournament, replays, and automatic scoring
- ❑ **PCG498 SCARY FISH v2.04** Multispecies Fishing Game 1-4 Players; over 25 species; many options Has Relaxing and Tournament modes. Shareware version has 49 holes at 6 worlds. Multicaps can occur. Different every time you play
- ❑ **PCG501 ASTROFIRE VGA** is a fast-moving arcade game featuring stunning 256 raytraced graphics. Blast your way through 25 levels of asteroids & alien ships, 286+
- ❑ **PCG509 REBEL WARS** Tired of the same old Hack and Slash? In Evangelist Wars, you play a slick Evangelist trying to make some quick cash and gain favour in the eyes of Gawd. Buy a church, recruit a congregation and choir, perform faith healings and get lucky with your secretary.
- ❑ **PCG512 DUNGEON GRIMLOR** VGA Find the Evil Dragon Grimlor & retrieve the GEM of Souls! Detailed Dungeons and Many Evil Monsters!
- ❑ **PCG516 KING ARTHUR'S** Great new Medieval strategy game in which you must conquer Great Britain. 256 colour VGA graphics, terrific theme music, digitized sound effects and voices! Who says valor and chivalry are dead. Req 286+, mouse.
- ❑ **PCG518 MVP BRIDGE VGA** If you like to play Bridge, or you would like to learn, MVP Bridge is for you. Featuring Sound Blaster support.
- ❑ **PCG519 OAKFLAT NUCLEAR** Simulates a pressurized water, nuclear fission power plant. User controls all major plant operations to generate safe and cost effective electrical power. The simulator will create random events such as fires, equipment failures, earthquakes, and even terrorist attacks.
- ❑ **PCG521 SHOOTING GALLERY** Offers 7 rounds of shooting action with arcade range's, skeet, target and wild west shootout.
- ❑ **PCG522 SPACE PILOT VGA** is a space-combat game in which Enemies shoots damage your shields. Shoot the enemies as soon as possible, or they will track you down and ram your ship.
- ❑ **PCG524 KINGDOM OF SYREE II - BLACK MAGIC (VGA)** Journey back to the land of Sheol where valiant knights fight against the Dark Forces. You, as the Lord Champion must find the new Keeper of the Power before Evil does, or all will be lost. Explore a world 150% larger than Syree I. New music, Graphics, Spells.
- ❑ **PCG525 QUATRA COMMAND** Total Action, Shoot-everything-that-moves Space adventure. Full Screen! Graphics, Full Digital STEREO! FX & Music Supported. 486-33+, 6MB, SB card. 256 Colours. (2)
- ❑ **PCG538 SPEED HANICAPPER** is a thoroughbred handicapping program. It computes speed panel-by-panel based upon internal points of call, information found in the Daily Racing Form (DRF).
- ❑ **PCG539 CYBERNESS KATE** is a shoot-everything-that-moves arcade game with colorful graphics and fast action. The game can be played with a joystick, keyboard, or a mouse.
- ❑ **PCG543 ROBOWARS** Transports you aboard the base of an enemy robot 's ship. You must fight your way through different levels of the ship to escape.
- ❑ **PCG546 PC-FAX-IT** is a fantasy graphical adventure game. You fight dragons, griffins and trolls as you trek

letters the Word

Write to: Dave Westley, The Word, PC Power, Durham House, 124 Old Christchurch Rd, Bournemouth, BH1 1NF.
Dino@dino-b.demon.co.uk

Dear Dave,
I have a problem. A lot of the demos on PC Power seem to be shareware and I have one or two other shareware games, but these all seem to need registering. As I do not know what this is, what I have to do, or what the benefits are, I am not in a position to register. Please could you explain this to me?
Nick Zair

Well... it's like this you see. When you buy a piece of shareware, or download it from a bulletin board, you only have a limited time in which to use it. If you want to continue using the software (be it a game or utility), then you have to register the game with the author. This involves sending a payment to him/her/them for which you'll receive the full version of the game, and, maybe, even a printed manual. Most authors also offer free updates for registered users, saving you the price of another registration fee.

The authors of shareware rely on the goodwill of users to purchase the programs they use, therefore allowing them to use the money for developing more programs. If you continue to use a shareware product without paying for it, you are depriving them of money that is rightfully theirs.

Actual ways of registering vary wildly – most of the time you will have to send an international money order to someone for the required amount, but other ways of registering exist. I've even seen a program labelled as bookware, where you had to purchase a book written by the author of the program and then send a photocopy of the cover to him.

It's a mad, mad, mad world, innit?

Dear Dave,
I recently saw an advert in your magazine for a company specialising in hiring out CD-ROM titles to PC users. The rates appear reasonable enough (although £2 a day for premiere titles could end up being costly). Anyway, as a result of this advert I'm probably going to try hiring a couple of titles.

Unfortunately, I heard recently that renting out these CD-ROM games is 'illegal', and that ELSPA are trying to put a stop to it.

I don't fully understand the complications of copyright in this situation, so could you explain what is happening and whether it is okay for me to send off for these rental titles?
Jonathan Morgan, Wakefield

Oh dear, oh dear. You've just put picked up one very hot potato and, at this very moment, it's burning its way through your hands. You see, upon publication of said advert, PC Power's advertising department were immediately contacted by ELSPA (the European Leisure Software Publishing Association) and advised to remove the advert. Why? Because it is, apparently, illegal to rent software without the publisher's permission. And, at the moment, most publishers are against the idea of CD rental.

This particular case is complicated by the fact that Multimedia Rentals, the company who have been advertising with PC Power, etc, have claimed that "effectively" they have not been renting the CDs at all but "selling them on a conditional basis." The customer pays a deposit, which covers the cost of the CD, and the consumer then either keeps the CD (thus losing his deposit) or returns it, getting back his deposit – minus a small fee.

There is also an accusation that Virgin, owned by Blockbuster Video, have allegedly been putting pressure on ELSPA to oppose CD rental until Blockbuster themselves want to enter the market. This 'rumour' has, however, been denied by ELSPA.

What the truth in all of this is, is unknown. And who really cares? What is important is that eventually CD rental will become common practice with structures set up to allow trade to take place legally. Then this industry can really start to grow.

Dear Dave,
I am the proud owner of a 486DX2-66Mhz state-of-the-art ninja PC. Amongst my numerous peripheries I have Sigma's RealMagic video card, allowing me to play VideoCDs which, I've read, offer me better visuals than my state-of-the-art VHS super video recorder (with Dolby surround sound). Yes, I do have too much money.

What I want to know is how much truth is there in the claim. I've heard lots of rumours that VideoCD isn't all it's cracked up to be. Should I spend my money on Naked Gun or whatever, or not? I might have pots of money (which I like to chuck about at peasants) but the last thing I want is for technology to make a mockery of me.

Yours with a bundle of tenners,
Bob, Hastings

Er, if I answer your questions do I get any money? Oh please!

I personally find VideoCD abysmal. Things are going to improve massively – as last month's Video Card Standard feature attests – but at the moment most MPEG cards can't cope with compressing/decompressing when anything moves too quickly on screen. You can actually see the image breaking up into pixels.

My advice then is to buy videos, for the moment. CD is the future, but then the future is tomorrow. Such profundity.

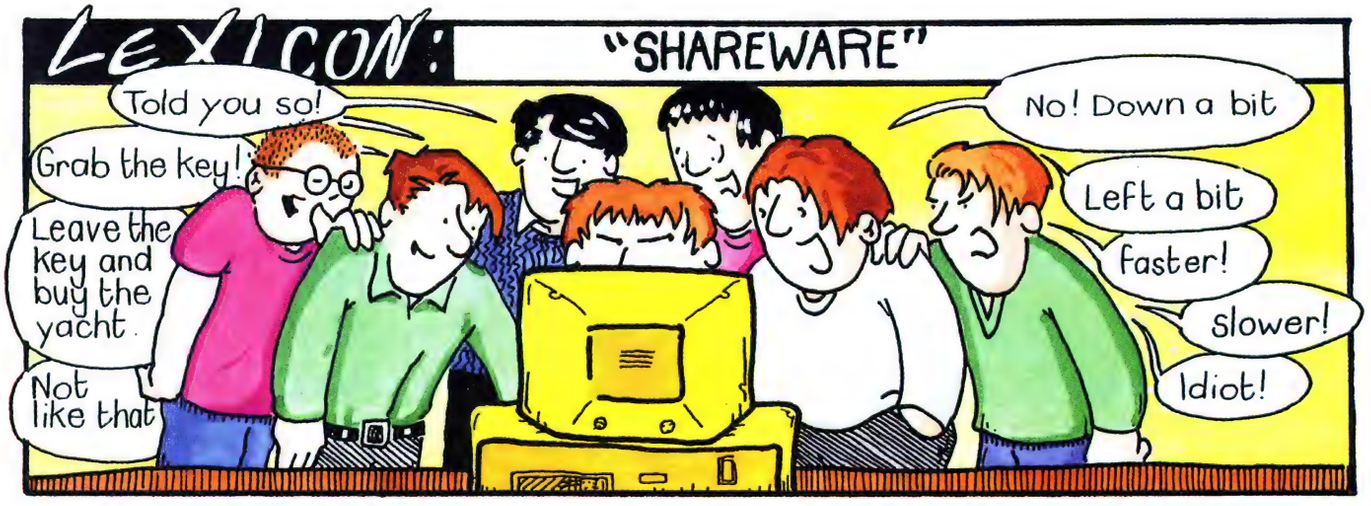
Dear Dave,
I am looking to buy a new PC for both work and gamesplaying purposes but I'm unsure as to what kind of machine I should buy. Do I need a 386, 486 or perhaps even a Pentium? Judging from the system requirements in your reviews section, the demands on the PC seem to be getting ever higher. The last thing I want is to buy a machine that's going to be obsolete in the next six months.

Also, what's more important – a faster processor or a good graphics card?
Frank Benjamin, Southall

Briefly, no PC is ever going to be completely future proof – even a Pentium. A 486DX2-66Mhz will keep you going long enough, however, with a double speed CD-ROM drive. Given that most games are graphics-intensive, a good graphics card is vital – if you can afford it get one with one or two Mb of RAM built into it. Then your PC should really fly.

'the Word' is sponsored by...

TEAM 17



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- ☐ PCG 147 **DOOM EXTRAS.** Level changer, editor, quick keys, maps, fixes, sound fix.
- ☐ PCG 148 **DOOM UPDATER v1.2** Updates Registered version of Doom (ID software) to 1.2 Req. VGA.
- ☐ PCG 149 **DOOM 3 D EXTRAS II**
- ☐ PCG 114 **DOOM AUDIO EDITOR** Edit the WAD files & change the sounds
- ☐ PCG 115 **DOOM MAP EDITOR** Change the maps or make a new one. Req. Mouse & SVGA.
- ☐ PCG 116 **DOOM MASTER v2.0** Shell/launcher for Doom 1.2 Modem support & quick config. etc.
- ☐ PCG 117 **DOOM LOAD v2.01A** Download the original Doom shell quicknet, & quickmodem. Full support for Doom v1.2.
- ☐ PCG 118 **DOOM SAVED GAME EDITOR v1.1 (WIN)** Edit saved games in windows.
- ☐ PCG 119 **DOOM THING EDITOR v2.0** Edit all the items lying around within the game.
- ☐ PCG 121 **DOOM EDIT v4.0** For Doom v0.99, v1.1, & Registered version. Maps, light visors, keys, health, weapons, amo, god mode etc.
- ☐ PCG 122 **MODEMDOON v1.00A.** Easy run Doom 1.2 over the modem.
- ☐ PCG 150 **DUNGEONS OF DOOM v1.12.** The danger awaits
- ☐ PCG 151 **WOLFENSTEIN 3D** (2 disks). Escape from the castle & kill the Nazis. Req 286 + VGA, HD Joystick, mouse or keyboard. Excellent stuff!
- ☐ PCG 152 **WOLFENSTEIN EXTRA BITS** Enhance Wolf 3D with another 20 levels, windows vewrsion, editor and gore graphics editor
- ☐ PCG 153 **WOLFENSTEIN 3D SPECIAL EDITION** New monster from MTV.
- ☐ PCG 101 **ASTROFIRE v1.0s.** Fast moving arcade game, stunning graphics. 25 levels of asteroids & alien ships. Req. 286 +, colour VGA
- ☐ PCG 102 **MARIO BROS VGA.** Keep the area free of pests. Excellent platform game.
- ☐ PCG 154 **MCRIA** Huge multi-level D & D adventure with great features
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- ☐ PCG 105 **CRUNCHER** Fast Pacman game. Req VGA.
- ☐ PCG 106 **CRUSHER v3.2** Adventure arcade & stratergy game all in one. Search 25 rooms for different objects. Excellent. Req EGA/VGA.
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- ☐ PCG 113 **RAKU MASTER VGA v1.0** Flip the red tiles back to grey in as few moves as possible. Test your logic skills.
- ☐ PCG 123 **CARD MASTER II** Collection of 4 card games Fantan, Oh Hell!, Funny game, Durok.
- ☐ PCG 124 **EERIE ESTATES** Virtual reality trip through an old haunted house. Locate the treasure. Req VGA.
- ☐ PCG 125 **ORBIT REBOUND BANKSHOT** A simple game combining elements of hockey, billiards and planetary orbits. Req 286 HERC or EGA-VGA, 386 & VGA.
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- ☐ PCG 135 **INTER-STELLER WARS** Tactical space combat adventure An Adlib/SB sound track is included. Req 640k RAM & VGA.
- ☐ PCG 136 **ON TARGET V1.5 VGA.** Artillery game. The very best of its kind, play friend or computer, mouse support, config. file etc. Addictive!
- ☐ PCG 137 **RAYX.** Travel & survive. Choice of 9 characters. You determine how you progress.
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- ☐ PCG 145 **MEGAPEDE** (2 disks) Great game! use mouse to shoot the caterpillers.
- ☐ PCG 155 **GAME WIZARD** Powerful cheats utility modify while playing game. Great features. Req 286/386/486 PENTIUM, VGA/SVGA, DOS 3.1 + L Adlib/Sound Blaster.
- ☐ PCG 156 **GRAND PRIX.** Be a manager, hiring & firing.
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- ☐ PCG 158 **CRIBBAGE v1.0** Good CGA graphical game.
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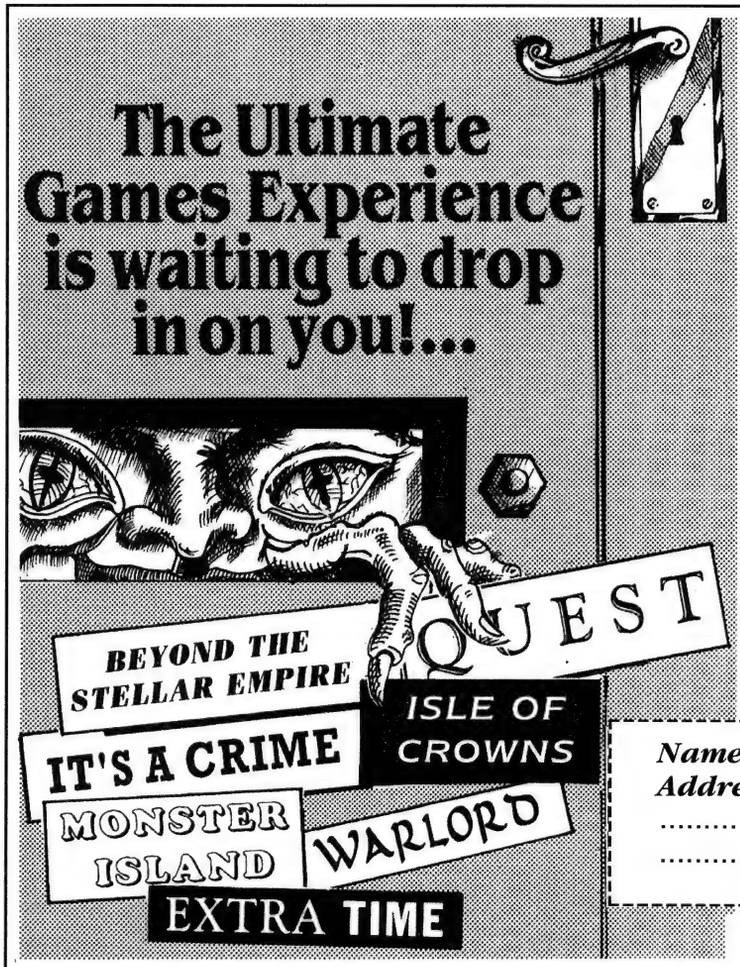

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The Fantasy Zone

It was bad enough when it was just Trolls and Tunnels, but then it turned into Dungeons and Dragons and now it's Vampires and Werewolves and the situation has become really deadly. This month The Fantasy Zone goes where angels fear to tread – the world of the table-top role-player.

Now, it has been said that when a table-top role-player leaves the room, it feels as if someone interesting has just walked in. However, bearing in mind what the Welsh shepherd told the judge, (i.e. "Don't knock it 'til you've tried it") I decided this month to track down this misunderstood hobbyist and discover what it is that tempts him to battle with the fiends of hell across that dark landscape of veneer.

It was dusk on a late summer's evening as I stood in the shadows of the town centre. It was that 'in-between time', that pause in the day when the streets are almost empty, when the last of the town's 'day people' have left for home, and the evening revellers have still to appear. I watched the few remaining window-shoppers dawdling past the store fronts, just a few souls bent on losing a little time before finding somewhere to rejoin life's mainstream again. Then I saw him. He appeared from nowhere and came hurrying towards me. Over his head he wore Walkman earphones, and across his shoulder swung a battered haversack. He glanced at the watch on his wrist and then quickened his pace. I judged him to be in his late teens or early twenties, and from what I could see he appeared to have put his clothes on with a spade. A few yards past me he stopped and looked back hurriedly, as if checking to see whether he was being followed. I followed his gaze back down the street but there was no-one there. When I looked back to where he had stood, the pavement was empty. Cursing, I leaped from my hiding place and made for the spot. A previously unnoticed side-alley led off into the gloom alongside the jeweller's store, but there was no sign of my quarry. Something glinting red caught my eye, and I moved into the alley and picked up a shiny piece of plastic which lay on the cobbles. It was a small ten-sided die. The alley turned behind high walls and dipped below a low roof, coming to halt before a dark shopfront bearing the legend 'Dungeoneer'. I had found him!

A sign on the shop door confirmed that tonight was club-night, so I pushed my way inside and followed the sound of laughter to a back room. Here I found four large tables laid out with bottles of coke, heaped with packets of sweets, and surrounded by noisy, laughing young men. The evening's games had begun so I slipped quietly into a spare seat and melted into the background.

It soon transpired that the six people seated about me were ten-foot tall werewolves who were out on a spending spree. Having spent the previous weeks in murder and mayhem (a single game can last for 18 months!) they had decided that tonight they were going to downtown Washington where they could buy clothes for a new female member of the pack. It seemed she had ripped her frock to shreds during a recent transformation, so logically they had decided that they would have to visit a dress shop to obtain another. The mind boggled at this point. I did think of pointing out that they could have more interestingly solved the problem by lurking in an alley until a female of the correct size walked past, then savagely murdering her and taking the dress. However, it was too late for that as the pack seemed to be caught up in the fun of deciding between the pretty blue number with the lace collar, and the yellow one which brought out the colour of her eyes. When they then decided to visit a jeweller's shop to buy accessories, I figured it was time to move to another table. It appears that when the going gets tough – werewolves go shopping!

At the other end of the room I discovered a group involved in a traditional Dungeons & Dragons game. Here was familiar territory. Upon the wall was the map of Waterdeep and the entrance to the sewers beneath the city. I heard the familiar name of Khelben the Wizard being uttered, and the memory of the *Eye of The Beholder* computer games came flooding back. Eight males both young and not so young sat drinking coke and laughing loudly with each other. I inquired of my neighbour what was happening, and he explained.

They were six beautiful female(!) adventurers who had come to answer the call for mercenaries. Evil was once more abroad in the town of Waterdeep and only the brave and the fearless could save the day. The Dungeon Master sat at the head of the table like a storyteller of old, explaining what fearful dangers lay before the newcomers. He described the chamber where they stood, and drew a word picture of the mystical empty throne which sat on the raised dais before them. He then explained that cruel Fate and

the evil guardians of the town had stripped our heroes/heroines of all their weapons, magical potions and useful artefacts, so things were going to get pretty tough in the hours to come. One hero/heroine protested that he/she did in fact possess a mighty spell acquired in a previous game which had been tattooed on her belly-button, so surely she still had that at her command? An urgent consultation took place between player and Dungeon Master which ended with a grudging acceptance of this unusual asset.

With the scene set, the DM sat back and waited for the players to decide amongst themselves what they would do next. Table-top role-playing allows the players to suggest any course of action they wish, providing the character they control has the means to carry it out. The purpose of the DM is to arbitrate on whether their action is feasible, and if it is, decide with the help of a dice roll whether their action was successful. Where a short time-scale has been agreed upon the DM will steer the players along the road he wishes them to travel, but in other games the characters are given almost total freedom to travel up as many backwaters as they wish.

In this event the players took a move in the wrong direction and ended up on a mysterious bridge where each step carried with it a magical forfeit. With a flourish the DM produced a pack of tarot cards, and dealt the first unfortunate adventuress her fate. To the delight of the others the player was informed that this beautiful female warrior had been turned into a small, hairy gnome. The player's crestfallen face was something to behold, for this was no small matter. What must be remembered is that such a change is binding on a character and all the weeks and months that may have been spent cultivating and improving the alter ego's skills had been wiped out in a flash of sulphur. You have no choice but to accept the DM's ruling and go forward into the future being responsible for a character which you may dislike intensely. Now you know how Bob Monkhouse's parents felt for all those years.

In the beginning

It is generally agreed that role playing began with a simple game called Tunnels and Trolls, but when an American version called Dungeons & Dragons reached these shores, things took off in a really big way. The American company TRS promoted Dungeons & Dragons and published large compendiums of rules and bestiaries of monsters, which gave the game a solid foundation. Funny-sided dice and tables of statistics were provided to help players calculate the probability of successful actions, and metal miniature figures were sold in packs to help the players visualise any scene they were enacting. As players grew more inventive, a second series of books was published called the Advanced Dungeon & Dragons series. These new manuals listed even more monsters, scenarios and arcane objects which could be used to make life more interesting. The major appeal of such games is that you can take the same fantasy character through an endless series of games, all the while increasing their abilities, and amassing an armoury of super weapons and magical implements. If you found a silver sword that could cut through steel in one game it was okay to take it with you into the next. By allowing your character to grow in wisdom and power you are able to take on ever more dangerous and complex situations. The problem with this game system is that after a while all the regular players end up controlling invincible supermen who are fitted out with the magical equivalent of a megaton bomb in the trousers. When this happens the poor DM has to resort to inventing more and more complex situations to tax the players and their superhero familiars.

In the last two years some players have turned their back on the traditional D&D scenarios and have found a more logical system in the worlds of Vampire and Werewolf. These two new gaming systems still take part in the worlds of the fantastic, but logic plays a larger part. Unlike the high level wizards from the D&D worlds, vampires and werewolves cannot become so powerful that they are invulnerable. Stuff a wooden stake up a vampire's jumper and he is in real trouble. Shoot a careless werewolf with a silver bullet and he is going down for good. If you are looking for pure escapism, then AD&D is your game. However, if you prefer a logical reality base (damage, cause and effect) then one of the newer systems is probably more your pot of dice.

Business is war

My investigations into the worlds of D&D revealed that there are two main groups of role-play shops – the Games Workshop chain, and everyone else! You won't be surprised to learn that, as with all things which appear straightforward at first, there is trouble and strife behind every door I opened. There is a saying that "Business is war" and in the case of role-playing and war-gaming this is very appropriate. The independent role-play shops see themselves as Davids against the Goliath of the Games

Classic one-liners

It's strange, but there are times when one line in a movie seems to hit the spot and lodges in our collective memory. Here's a few classic one-liners from fantasy films; can you name the movie and the name of the character who spoke it?

1. **"Game Over, Man!"**
2. **"I'll be back."**
3. **"Get this walking carpet out of my face."**
4. **"I'm sorry Dave, I can't allow you to do that."**
5. **"Your move – creep!"**
6. **"More Input!"**
7. **"Be good."**
8. **"It's a twister, Auntie Em!"**
9. **"Wait 'til they get a load of me."**
10. **"Do you want to see something really scary?"**

Answers 1. Aliens – Hicks. 2. Terminator – Big Arnie. 3. Star Wars – Princess Leia. 4. 2001 – HAL. 5. Robocop – Himself. 6. Short Circuit – Number 5. 7. ET – Himself. 8. Wizard of OZ – Dorothy. 9. Batman – The Joker. 10. Twilight Zone – the hitchhiker.

Table-top role-playing offers an oasis of co-operation and good humour. It's a cheap, fun-filled evening with no booze and no drugs. The players get their stimulants from bottles of pop and bowls of sweets. There's nothing like a sugar-jag when you're facing a mighty warrior, and you're a wrinkled old gnome!

"One hero/heroine protested that he/she did in fact possess a mighty spell acquired in a previous game which had been tattooed on her belly-button, so surely she still had that at her command?"

Workshop. Each side accuses the other of dirty tricks and unfair business practices, and each side has its fair share of defenders. The independent shops claim that they are the true guardians of the hobby's soul, and insist that the Games Workshop conglomerate are simply in it for the money. Well that may or may not be true, but I'll hold my tongue for now as I know that in the coming months I will end up visiting the other camp and then I guarantee I will be told another tale.

How do I get into role playing?

The easy way to start is simply to contact your nearest role-play shop, for you can be sure that they will either run their own games, or know of a group which does.

Although the number of manuals which list all of the rules, monsters, spells, races etc. has grown to awesome proportions, there are really only two which are essential – the Dungeon Master's Manual and the Player's Guide. You will also need a set of silly-sided dice and a few character sheets. A few miniatures of heroes and monsters would be useful but not essential. The DM can write a mini story which he can use as the basis for the adventure you are about to play, but if inspiration fails you can buy a game module for around £15. The game module will contain maps and the history of the locality, a storyline for the players to work around and the names and descriptions of the characters who will be required to take part. The DM should be the only one who knows the plot and what traps and monsters are knocking around the dungeon, so it will be up to him to use his storytelling skills to set the scene for the players. The players must decide what they want to do and then tell the DM. Each player will have a Character Sheet which lists their hero's attributes, (e.g. Health Status, Strength, Magical Abilities) and as they progress through the tale the sheets will be amended in response to gaining or losing points. There is no need for the players to worry about following the plotline, it's up to the DM to take care of that.

In conclusion

So what did I learn from my night with the table-toppers? What I didn't find in that back room was a lot of strange characters simply absorbed in rolling dice and recording hit points on character sheets. What I did find was a host of people having a great time, laughing, joking and sharing an evening together. What came across most strongly was that here was an oasis of good humour, no aggro, and no one was having to prove themselves. To win in this room you had to work as a team, consider the result of your actions, and use your imagination. It was a cheap, fun-filled evening with no booze and no drugs. Bottles of soft drink were passed around with the same gravity and etiquette as the port at the Colonel's Table, and the only dangerous substance I saw being consumed in vast quantities was that pure, white, deadly substance which makes your teeth fall out. Interestingly I found that a good number of the company possessed PCs and Amigas, and when they were not down the club they also enjoyed *Doom*-blasting and adventure games. Most importantly I found an effective defence against werewolf attack – a smash round the head with a handbag!

Remember that I'm always interested in hearing from you. Write to: Mitch, The Fantasy Zone, PC Power, Paragon Publishing, Durham House, 124 Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, BH1 1NF.

Privateer

Do you ever feel that you were born out of your time? It's a constant source of disappointment to me that I'll be long gone before there's a chance to fly a Cobra around Pluto's moons. The metallic scream of a TIE Fighter entering the trench on the Death Star may never become a reality, but it sounds very loud in my imagination. This month I consulted with some dedicated space pilots as to their favourite space shoot'em-up and they recommended *Privateer* from EA. Despite the latest releases from LucasArts, these space rats insisted that the game still had a lot to offer. Ignoring the strangely low scores which the CD version of this game received in most magazines, I fitted myself up with the game and set off to find fame and fortune across the dark reaches of space.

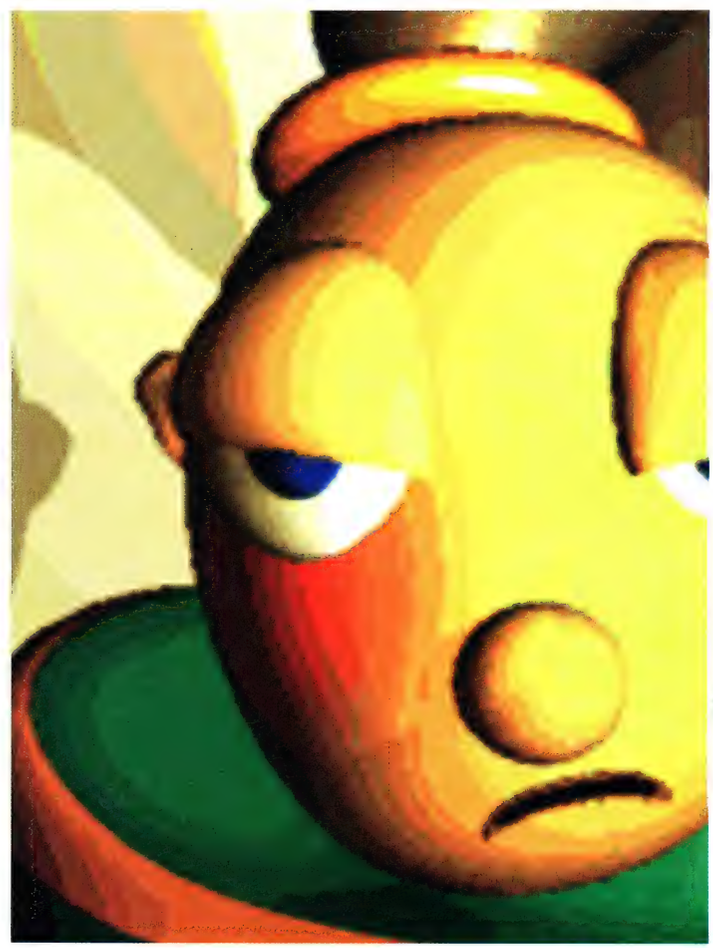
Like *Elite* before it, *Privateer* is a basically simple, trader/mercenary game which involves amassing money by hauling cargo around the galaxy and picking up extra credits for destroying pirates. More money means faster ships and bigger guns, and it's this addictive urge to see what you can do with the next wonderful gadget that's on sale in the shipyard that keeps you flying and blasting. I've played so many games in the last fifteen years that they all merge into one, but *Privateer* has that something which keeps you coming back for more. There is very little to irritate you, and you are free to go where you please. The action is fast and furious, and that itch which we have to chase and destroy that which stands between us and the object of our desires is well scratched. The blast of fire which envelops the enemy ships as our missiles strike home gives an adrenaline rush which we should all be ashamed of, but then it's only a game isn't it? I like it.

Next month

This month we've titillated you with stunning glimpses of how Adeline's *Little Big Adventure* looks. Next month, all will be revealed in an in-depth, big and not-at-all little review.

As always, we also have the double, thick, whipping cream of the crop of features for you to read. Fancy playing a 3DO game on your PC, or how about a Jaguar game? Maybe not, but we'll show you how to do it anyway, in a look at Jaguar and 3DO add-on cards for the PC. In the second of our 'Power-Test' series, we look at all of the WWII flight-sims available at the moment and pick the best ones so you can buy with total confidence. We also put VideoCD on trial and speak to Gametek, the publishers of *Hell*, the next challenger for the interactive movie throne. This game-cum-film features cult movie veteran, Denis Hopper, for added horror, fear, dread and all-round getting the willies.

No issue of PC Power would be complete without our top-notch reviews. Next month, as well as *Little Big Adventure* look out for reviews of *Lords of Midnight*, *Lords of the Realm*, *Harvester* and many, many more.



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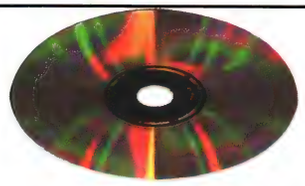

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